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A DISTINGUISHED REVIEWER SAYS OF PRAIRIE FLOWER:—

“Prairie Flower” is indeed a remarkable book, and contains all the elements for present popularity and enduring fame. It is brim-full of life, love, passion, sentiment, humor and pathos; and its glowing descriptions, romantic incidents, daring adventures, fearful perils, thrilling exploits, dreadful accidents, and hair-breadth escapes—all run through and interweave with a deep, ingenious and intricate plot. The scene is on and over the Broad Prairies and Rocky Mountains of the Mighty West, before the conquering tread of civilization had entered upon their vast solitudes, when roving tribes of Indians, and a few half-civilized hunters and trappers, traversed the lonely region, literally carrying their lives in their hands.

. We feel no hesitation in placing Mr. Bennett among the foremost of American writers. Of course we do not include metaphysics, nor history, nor philosophy, (although it must be confessed that his writings prove his perfect familiarity with each) but we mean that he is the best writer, taken all in all, of any in this country in the particular field of literature which he has chosen. There are doubtless many writers who excel him in some minor points—but, taken as a whole, his works are unrivalled on this side of the Atlantic.

In all that he writes there seems to be an irresistible charm, holding the reader spell-bound from the beginning to the end. That this gift is natural and not acquired, we assume from reading some of his earlier productions. We well remember the eagerness with which “Prairie Flower” was sought after and devoured upon its first appearance. Everybody read it—everybody talked about it—and, for a time, not to have seen “Prairie Flower,” was to acknowledge yourself guilty of unpardonable ignorance.

As a proof of the public appreciation of “Prairie Flower,” we have only to state that 91,000 copies of this work have already been sold, and that the Publishers now present a new and handsome edition, which has been carefully revised and corrected by the author himself.

PRAIRIE FLOWER:

OR,

ADVENTURES IN THE FAR WEST.

BY

EMERSON BENNETT,

AUTHOR OF

"CLARA MORELAND," "BORDER LILLY," "OUTLAW'S DAUGHTER,"
"A MISER'S WILL," "A MIDNIGHT CRIME," "VILLETA LINDEN,"
"PHANTOM OF THE FOREST," "BROTHERHOOD OF DEATH,"
"MATE CLARENDON," "BRIDE OF THE WILDERNESS,"
"FOREST ROSE," ETC., ETC., ETC.

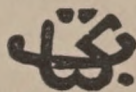
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"By feid, by flood, by fire, by air,
We found our perils everywhere."

A NEW EDITION.

COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.

CAREFULLY REVISED AND CORRECTED BY THE AUTHOR.

NINETY-SECOND THOUSAND.

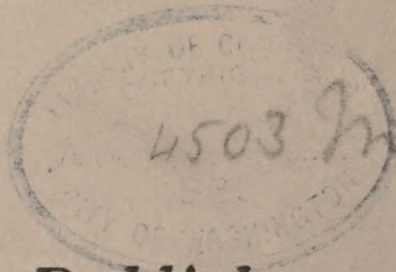


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PRAIRIE FLOWER.

INTRODUCTORY.



S almost every one who takes any interest in a story, has some desire or curiosity to know how or why it came to be written, and as there are some things of which he desires to speak particularly, the author, compiler or editor of *Prairie Flower* (whichever you please, reader), has, after due consideration, decided on giving this information in an introductory note.

While engaged in writing for the press, a tall, dark-visaged, keen-eyed individual entered his sanctum early one morning, bearing in his hand a bundle of no inferior size. Having stared around the apartment, as if to assure himself there was no mistake, he coolly took the only remaining seat, when the following conversation ensued.

STRANGER.—I s'pose you're an author ?

AUTHOR.—That is my profession.

STRANGER.—He-e-m ! (A pause.) Write novels, I presume ?

AUTHOR.—When I have nothing better to do.

STRANGER.—(After a little reflection.) Found them on facts, eh ?

AUTHOR.—Sometimes, and sometimes draw rather freely on the imagination, as the case may be.

STRANGER.—How would you like the idea of writing one *that should contain nothing but facts ?*

AUTHOR.—(Becoming interested, and laying down his pen.) I have no objection, provided there are facts enough, and of a nature sufficiently exciting to make the story interesting to the general reader.

STRANGER.—(Smiling complacently and tapping his bundle.) I've got the documents here, and no mistake. Every word true, I pledge you my honor. Promise to work them up faithfully, and they are at your service.

AUTHOR.—(In doubt.) But how am I to know that they contain *only* facts?

STRANGER.—You have my word, sir!

AUTHOR.—Did you write them? Do they comprise a journal of your own adventures?

STRANGER.—(A little testily.) No matter about either! They contain nothing but facts, and that is enough for any reasonable man to know.

AUTHOR.—I see—it is all right, of course.

STRANGER.—(Again smiling pleasantly.) So you will undertake the business, and give facts in everything but the most important names?

AUTHOR.—I will try.

STRANGER.—(Placing the package upon the table and rising.) You can have them, then. All I ask is that you will be a faithful chronicler. The names I wish changed you will find marked. I have a desire to see the whole in print, and you may take all the profit and whatever credit you please, so you keep fact in view. The incidents are romantic, and sufficiently exciting for your purpose, without embellishment. I shall keep an eye upon the publication; and you *may* see me again, or you may not—I make no promises. Good-morning, sir!

AUTHOR.—(Rising to bow him out.) But your name, stranger, if you please?

STRANGER.—(Hesitating.) I am called the Wanderer. Good-morning, sir!

AUTHOR.—Good-morning, Mr. Wanderer! (Returns to the mysterious package, opens, examines it, begins to read, gets interested, and goes to bed the night following at a very late hour.)

Having shown you how he became possessed of the *facts* of the story, the author would say a few words

more concerning the characters set forth in the following narration. He would state, that, *being all real*, some represent a class, and some an individual only. *Prairie Flower is drawn from real life*. That the proceedings of herself and tribe may appear mysterious, and, to some, at first thought (her locality and everything considered), out of place, the author does not doubt; but he believes that no one who is conversant with Indian history, and especially with that relating to the North-western tribes and the Moravian Missions during the early settlement of Ohio, will find in this character or her tribe anything overstrained or unnatural. That she is a marked character, distinct and peculiar, and liable to be misconstrued by those who do not take everything into consideration, but allow a first fancy to have full sway—he admits; but at the same time he would desire such to withhold an expression of opinion until they shall have read to the end, when he trusts they will find the explanation entirely clear and satisfactory.

With the further simple statement that the scenes described may be looked upon as *real*, the author would take his respectful leave for the present, hoping the reader may find, if nothing else of interest, information regarding life in the Far West sufficient to repay a perusal.

CHAPTER I.

THE RESOLVE.

“ O! for Oregon—what say you, Frank Leighton?” exclaimed my college chum, Charles Huntly, rushing into my room nearly out of breath. “Come, what say you, Frank?” queried my companion again, as I looked up in some surprise.

“Why, Charley,” returned I, “what new notion has taken possession of your brain?”

"Oregon and adventure," he quickly rejoined, with flashing eyes. "You know, Frank, our collegiate course being finished, we must do something for the remainder of our lives. Now, for myself, I cannot bear the idea of settling down to the dry practice of law, without at least having seen something more of the world. You know, Frank, we have often planned together where we would go, and what we would do, when we should get our liberty; and now the Western fever has seized me, and I am ready to exclaim—ho! for Oregon."

"But, Charley," returned I, "consider that we are now in Boston, and that Oregon is thousands of miles away. It is much easier saying, ho! for Oregon, than it is getting to Oregon. Besides, what should we do when there?"

"Hunt, fish, trap, shoot Indians, anything, everything," cried my comrade, enthusiastically, "so we manage to escape ennui, and have plenty of adventure!"

"I must confess," said I, "that I like the idea wonderfully well—but—"

"But me no buts!" exclaimed Huntly; "you will like it—I shall like it—and we will both have such glorious times. College—law—pah! I am heartily sick of hearing of either, and long for those magnificent wilds where a man may throw about his arms without fear of hitting his neighbor. So come, Frank, set about matters—settle up your affairs, if you have any, either in money or love—and then follow me. Faith, man, I'll guide you to a real El Dorado, and no mistake."

The words of my companion produced a strong effect upon my naturally restless mind. Nothing that he could have proposed, at that moment, would have suited my inclination better than such a journey of adventure, and no companion would I have preferred to himself. We had been playmates together in infancy, we had studied together in youth, and we had been chums at old Harvard University.

From childhood up, I had loved Charles Huntly—or Charley, as I more familiarly termed him—as a brother; and this fraternal feeling I knew he as warmly returned. We walked together, played together, sung

together—ever took each other's part on all occasions, whether right or wrong—and, in fact, for our close intimacy, were dubbed the Siamese Twins. We were both only sons of wealthy parents—I myself was an only child, in fact ; but he had a sister—a sweet, modest, affectionate creature, some three years his junior—whom I loved with all the ardent passion of a fiery, impetuous youth ; and was, I *fancied*, loved in return. Be this as it might, my passion for his sister he knew and encouraged ; and this only added a stronger link to the chain of our friendship.

In age, Charles Huntly was my senior by nearly a year, and was now a little turned of twenty-one. In stature we were much alike—both being about five feet ten inches in height, with regular proportions. In complexion we differed materially ; he being light, with light curly hair ; and I dark, with hair black and straight. In personal appearance my friend was remarkably handsome and prepossessing. His beauty did not consist in the mere perfection of features—though these were, in general, very fine—so much as in the play and expression of the whole countenance, where every thought seemed to make an instant and passing impression. His forehead was high and broad, and stamped with intellect, beneath which shone a bright, blue eye, that could sparkle with mirth, or flash with anger, as the case might be. The contour of his face was a something between the Grecian and Anglo-Saxon, though the nose was decidedly of the former cast. His skin—fine, smooth and almost beardless—gave him an appearance so boyish that I was often mistaken for his senior by many years—a matter which generally irritated him not a little, as he had a strong repugnance to being thought effeminate. His temperament was strongly nervous. At heart he was truly noble and generous ; but this, by those who did not know him intimately, was very frequently overlooked in his hot and hasty temper. No one was more ready to resent an insult, or redress a wrong ; and as he was very tenacious of his own honor, so was he of another's. If you insulted him, you must take the consequences, and they would not be slow to follow,

unless ample apology were made, in which case his hand was ever open for friendship. If he did you a wrong, and became convinced of it, he could not rest until he had sued for pardon. He was wild at times in his notions, headstrong, hot-brained, and, in general, a great enthusiast. Whenever anything new took possession of his mind, it was the great all-in-all for the time being; but it was very apt to pass away soon, and be supplied by something equally as great and equally as evanescent.

Such, as I have just enumerated, were the striking points in the appearance and character of Charles Huntly; and though in the latter we were much alike, yet we seldom quarreled, and then only to become better friends the next time we met.

Now as Charles remarked, in language which I have already quoted, we had often, during our leisure moments, laid out plans of adventure for the future, when our collegiate course should be finished. But the plan of to-day had always been superseded by the one of to-morrow; so that, unless we resolved on something steadily, it was more than probable that the whole would result, simply, in speculating visions of the brain. The last proposition was, of course, the one which opens this chapter; and which had, perhaps, less weight with me at the moment, from my remembering the failure of all the others. Still, there was one thing in its favor which none of the others had had. We had completed our studies now, and were at liberty, if we resolved on it, to carry our project into immediate execution, before it should become trite; and besides, nothing before had seemed so fully to meet the views of both in every particular. Adventure was our delight, in every shape we could find it; as several powerful admonitions and premonitory warnings from our tutors, for various little peccadilloes, might well attest. But there was, notwithstanding, a drawback, which made me hesitate when my friend interrupted me. He was of age, but I was not; and my father might not be willing to give his consent, without which I certainly would not venture. Another; I loved Lilian Huntly; and should I go and leave her,

she might get married in my absence—a result which I felt was not to be endured.

While I sat, with my head upon my hand, buried in thought, rapidly running these things over in my mind, my companion stood watching me, as if to gather my decision from the expression of my countenance.

“Well, Frank,” said he, at length, “it seems you have become very studious all at once. How long is it going to take you to decide on accepting so glorious a proposition?”

“How long since the idea of it entered your head?” I inquired.

“Ten, fifteen, ay—(looking at his watch)—twenty minutes. I was down for the purpose of getting a carriage, when the thought came across me like a flash of lightning, and I turned and hurried back, to——”

“See me before you altered your mind,” interrupted I, completing his sentence.

“Oh, bother! Wait till I have done. I hurried back, I say, to let you share the bright prospect with me.”

“Humph! prospect indeed!” said I, with a laugh, merely for the purpose of annoying him; for I saw by his whole demeanor that he was decidedly in earnest. “And a prospect it will ever remain, I’m thinking, a long way ahead. You are joking, Charley, are you not?”

“No, by all the bright Cupids of fairy realms, I swear to you, Frank, my dear fellow, I never was so serious about anything in my life, since the time when I played the ghostly tin-pan drum for the edification of old Aunt Nabby.”

“But, allowing you are in earnest, you have overlooked two important points in asking me to accompany you.”

“What are they?”

“My father, and Lilian.”

“Tut, tut, tut, Frank—don’t be a fool!”

“That is exactly what I am trying to guard against, Charley.”

“Pshaw! stuff! nonsense!—what have your father and my sister to do with it?”

"Why, the first might refuse his consent to my going; and the last might consent to have my place filled in my absence."

"Well," answered Charley, "as for your father, I'll pledge you my word that he will give his consent; and for Lilian, that she will await your return, if it be six years hence."

"You will?" cried I, jumping up suddenly; "you will pledge your word to this, Charley?"

"Yes, I will pledge you my honor to both, if you will say the word."

"Enough! here is my hand on it!" I cried.

The next moment my fingers felt the powerful pressure of those of my enthusiastic friend.

"Now, Frank," he almost shouted, capering about the room for joy, "you are pledged beyond a back-out."

"On condition you make your pledge good."

"I will do it or die!"

"Then enough is said!"

"Hurrah, then, for some glorious adventures!" cried Charles Huntly, darting out of my room and down a flight of stairs, to the imminent danger of his neck: "Hurrah for the Rocky Mountains, Oregon, and the far, Far West!"

CHAPTER II.

LOVE AND JEALOUSY.



T was a clear, starlight evening, in the month of May, that I found myself slowly nearing the fine mansion of Benjamin Huntly, to behold my sweet and dearly-loved Lilian, perhaps for the last time. I felt strangely, as I had never felt before. A week had elapsed, and all had been arranged for my departure at an early hour on the following morning. The consent of my parents had been reluctantly yielded to the powerful eloquence and

soft persuasion of my enthusiastic friend. Already had my trunks been packed, and my purse filled for the long separation. Already had I listened to the paternal advice of my father, and seen the tears of sorrow in my beloved mother's eyes. The struggle of consent, but not of parting, was now over; and I was wending my way to the house of my friend, to take leave of one, at the thought of whom my heart ever beat rapidly. As I said before, I felt strangely. I was about to bid adieu—a long, perchance a last, adieu—to all the bright scenes of my childhood—to friends near and dear to me—to father and mother—and last, though not least, to the idol of my purer thoughts.

It is hard, very hard, to leave the scenes of our youth for the first time—to venture forth, we scarce know whither, like a feather borne unconsciously upon the strongest current of air. However much we may plan in secret—however strikingly we may draw the pictures of adventure in the rosy colors of anticipation—however great may be our inclination to go and see the world for ourselves; yet when the time of separation comes—when we are about to cut the cord that binds us to all we have ever seen and loved—the heart grows sad, and soft, and we feel as if staggering under the weight of some impending calamity.

Thus I felt, and a great deal more which I cannot describe, as I paused for a moment upon the steps of Lilian Huntley's dwelling, to compose my agitated nerves and appear calm and collected. Why was it that my agitation should now only increase? Why could I never appear before her as before any other I had ever seen—cool and collected? Why must my heart always flutter so, and my usually free-coming words stick chokingly in my throat, or congeal upon my lips? Was it because I loved her? I would have given half of my expected inheritance to have been able to talk to her freely, as I could to others. I had often tried it, but in vain. I always made a fool of myself, and I knew it. I fancied Lilian knew it too; and this only added to my embarrassment. My heart and my self-esteem whispered me I was loved; but my bashful fears told me the con-

trary. I had never tested her, and now I was about to do it. If she loved me, she would plainly show it at the moment of separation. I was shortly to be made happy or miserable—or miserably happy; for if she loved me, I should be happy in knowing it—unhappy in the thought of a long parting. I trembled as I thought.

At last, with a desperate effort, I assumed a courage I did not possess, and, ascending the steps, rang the bell. In another minute I was ushered into the parlor, and the servant who admitted me was gone to summon my fair judge. I gazed around upon the beautiful paintings which adorned the walls, but without seeing them. I felt like a guilty culprit about to hear his doom. Could money, at that moment, have purchased me easy assurance, I would have had it at any price. I remained in suspense some five minutes, when the door opened and Lilian entered—entered like a fairy being into her golden realms.

Heavens! how lovely! I had never seen her, or aught else, look so enchantingly sweet before. In complexion and features, Lilian strongly resembled her brother—save that everything was more soft, more effeminate, more exquisitely beautiful. Her skin was fair, and clear as alabaster, with a slight tint of crimson upon each cheek. Her features were all of the finest mold. Her large, soft, clear blue eyes were rendered extremely fascinating by long, drooping, delicately-fringed lashes. In their depths was a soul of tender thought, feeling and love; and, most joyful discovery! they were now swimming in tears. She loved me, then, and had been weeping at the thought of my leaving her! The expression of her sweet countenance, too, was sad. Her plump, cherry lips were just parted, as if about to speak, displaying two rows of beautiful pearls. Her light hair was arranged *a la mode*, and a bright, glowing diamond sparkled on her forehead. Her exquisitely faultless form was arrayed in the emblem of purity, a snow-white dress, which almost made me fancy her an ethereal, spiritual visitor.

She advanced with a timid step, and held out her snowy, dimpled hand. She tried to speak, but language

failed her. I tried to do the same, with a like success. I took a step toward her, and her hand touched mine. Heavens! what emotions thrilled me! I was beside myself with the deepest joy I had ever felt. I forgot formality, caution, prudence, everything—and, before I knew what I was about, or how I did it, my lips were pressed to hers. The pressure was returned, one moment, and then she sprung away, blushing and confused. Think what you may of it, reader, that was one of the happiest moments of my life.

I was the first to break the silence, and I trembled as I did so.

"I have come, Miss Lilian," I stammered, "to—to——"

"I understand," she murmured, faintly, sinking into a seat; while slowly the tears, that could not be suppressed, stole down her now pale cheeks; "I understand; I am about to lose a—a—brother, and a—a—friend."

Friend! heavens! how cold that word! It should be clipped by every lexicographer and sent out of existence! Friend! Why, it chilled my blood, and for the moment made me an enemy of the language which harbored it. Was there, then, no other term—one a little more endearing?—and if so, why did she select one so cold? Perhaps she meant it! Perhaps her grief was only for the loss of a brother, and—if I must use the hateful term—*a friend*! In that case she could not love me. I had once more made a fool of myself. But I would not do so again. I would let her see that I could be as indifferent as herself. She should not have cause to boast in after times—perhaps when wedded to another—how much I loved her, and how much she pitied me. No! I would be as cold as marble—ay! as a Lapland iceberg.

These thoughts went through my mind rapidly; and but a brief pause succeeded, before I said, coolly enough, Heaven knows:

"Yes, Miss Huntly, I have come to bid you a last farewell, and have but a few spare moments to do it in."

I looked at her indifferently as I spoke, and oh!

what would I not have given to recall those words ! Her soft, blue eyes turned full upon me, with a mingled expression of surprise and reproach, which I shall never forget. Her cheeks grew more deadly pale than ever ; and her lips quivered, as she sighed, almost inaudibly, my name. There was no withstanding this ; and on the impulse of the moment, I threw myself at her feet, and exclaimed :

“ Oh, Lilian ! sweet Lilian ! I have wronged you ! You love me, Lilian !—you love me ! ”

She did not answer, but her look spoke volumes, as her eyes modestly sought the ground, and a slight flush beautifully tinted her cheeks. I seized her hand rapturously, and pressed it warmly. She did not return the pressure, neither did she seek to avoid it. I was in raptures, and I felt a soul of eloquence on my lips.

“ I wronged you, Lilian ! ” I said passionately. “ I thought you were cold-hearted, because you called me friend. But I was mistaken, I see ! I was expecting a warmer term ; but I had forgotten it was not your place to use it first. Lilian, dear Lilian—permit me so to call you—I am about to go far away ; and God only knows when, if ever, I shall return. Pardon me, then, if I improve the present moments, and speak the sentiments of my heart. I have known you, Lilian, from a child ; but I have known you only to love and adore. You have been the ideal of my boyish dreams, either sleeping or waking. The perfection of divine beauty with me has had but one standard—your own sweet, faultless face and form. Every happy thought of my existence has somehow had a connection with yourself. I could not picture happiness, without drawing you in glowing colors, the foremost and principal figure. I have thought of you by day, dreamed of you by night, for many years—have longed to be near you—have worshiped you in secret—and yet have never dared to tell you so till now. Whenever tempted to do wrong, your lovely face has been my Mentor, to chide and restrain me. I have loved you, Lilian—deeply, passionately, devotedly loved you, with the first, undefiled love of an ardent temperament—as I never can love another. I am about to leave, and

I tell you this, and only ask if I am loved in return. Speak ! let your sweet lips confirm what your looks have spoken, and I shall be the happiest of human beings !”

I ceased, and paused for an answer.

While speaking, the head of the fair being, at whose feet I kneeled, had gradually, unconsciously as it were, sunk upon my shoulder, where it now reposed in all its loveliness. She raised her face, crimson with blushes and wet with tears. Her hand, still held in mine, trembled—and her lips, as she essayed to speak, trembled also.

“Oh, Francis !” she at length articulated ; and then there came a silence.

“Say on, Lilian, and make me happy !”

“No, no !” she said quickly, looking hurriedly around her, as if fearful of the presence of another.

“No, no, Francis—not now—some other time.”

“But you forget, dear Lilian, that I am about to leave you—that there may never be a time like the present ! Only say you love me, fair one, and it is all I ask.”

“But—but—” she stammered, and then paused.

“Ha ! then I have after all mistaken friendship for love ?” I returned, quickly, starting abruptly to my feet.

Again her soft, reproachful eyes met mine, and every angry impulse vanished before their heavenly beams.

“You mistake me, Francis,” she said. “I—I—” another pause.

Again was I at her feet, ashamed of my hasty display of jealous temper.

“The word is trembling upon your lips, Lilian,” I exclaimed ; “speak it, and——”

At this moment, to my astonishment and chagrin, the door suddenly opened, and an elegantly-dressed gentleman, some five or six years my senior, highly perfumed, took one step over the threshold ; and then, perceiving me, he drew quickly back, evidently as much surprised and embarrassed as myself. Meantime, I had sprung to my feet, with a whirlpool of feelings in my breast, impossible to be described—the predominant of which were anger, mortification and jealousy. Lilian, too, had started up, and turned toward the stranger (stranger to me) with an embarrassed air.

"I crave pardon," said the intruder, coloring, "for my seeming rudeness in appearing thus unannounced! I found the outer door ajar, and made bold to step in, without ringing, not thinking to meet with any here save the regular members of the family."

"Then you must either be a constant visitor, or no gentleman, to take even that liberty!" I rejoined, in a sarcastic tone of some warmth.

The face of the intruder became as scarlet at my words; and his eyes flashed indignantly as he replied, in a sharp, pointed tone:

"I *am* a regular visitor here, sir! but *your* face is new to me."

"Indeed!" I rejoined, with an expression of contempt, turning my eyes upon Lilian, as if for an explanation.

She was trembling with embarrassment, and her features were alternately flushing and paling, like the rapid playings of an aurora borealis. She hastened to speak, to cover her confusion, and prevent, if possible, any further unpleasant remarks.

"This—this—is Mr. Wharton, Francis," she stammered; "a gentleman who calls here occasionally. Mr. Whar—Wharton, Mr. Leighton—an old friend of mine."

Of course the rules of good breeding required us to bow on being thus formally introduced to each other; and this we did, but very stiffly, and with an air of secret hate and defiance. That moment we knew ourselves to be rivals, and consequently enemies; for it was impossible there should be any love between us. As for myself, I was powerfully excited, and indignant beyond the bounds of propriety. Hasty, passionate and jealous in my disposition, I was unfit to love any one; for to me

"Trifles light as air,
Were confirmations strong as proofs of Holy Writ,"

in consequence of which I only loved, to be miserable, and render the object loved equally so.

I exchanged no more words with Wharton; but

turning to Lilian, I said, with all the coolness my boiling blood would allow :

"So, then, the riddle is solved. Had you been frank enough to inform me that you expected *particular* company to-night, I should certainly ere this have ridden you of my presence."

"Oh, Francis!" cried Lilian, with an imploring, reproachful look, from eyes moist with tears; "you are mistaken!—indeed, indeed you are!"

"Oh, yes, of course!" I replied, bitterly, as I coolly drew on my glove, and prepared to take my final leave. "Of course I am, or *was*, mistaken; but I shall not be likely to be again immediately, I presume. Farewell, Miss Huntly!" I continued, coldly, rudely extending to her my gloved hand; "I shall probably never see you again, as I leave at an early hour in the morning."

Oh, what a look she gave me at that moment, of sweet, heart-touching, mournful reproach—a look which haunted me for days, for weeks, for months, for years—a look which, were I an artist, would peradventure be found upon every face I painted.

"Francis!" she gasped, and sunk fainting and colorless upon a seat.

This, in spite of my jealous feelings, touched me sensibly; and I was on the point of springing to her aid, when Wharton passed me for the purpose. I could stand no more—the devil was in me—and, with a scarcely suppressed imprecation upon my lips, I rushed from the apartment.

In the hall I met my friend Charles.

"Ha, Frank," he exclaimed, "you seem flurried! What has happened?"

"Ask me no questions," I replied, pointing with my finger to the apartment I had just quitted. "Give my kind regards to your parents, and bid them farewell for me."

"But stay a moment!"

"No! I must go;" and I seized my hat and made for the door.

"All ready for the start in the morning, I suppose, Frank?"

"Ay, for to-night, if you choose!" I replied, as I hurried down the steps leading to the street.

I paused a moment, as my feet touched the pavement; and, as I did so, I heard the voice of Huntly summoning the servants to the aid of his sister. I waited to hear no more; but darted away down the street, like a madman, scarcely knowing, and caring less, whither I went.

Such was my parting with Lilian Huntly.

At last I found my way home; and softly stealing to my chamber, I threw myself upon the bed—but not to sleep. I slept none that night. My brain was like a heated furnace. I rolled to and fro in the greatest mental torture I had ever endured.

Morn came at last, and with it Charles Huntly, all prepared for the journey. I ate a morsel, pointed out my trunks, sighed a farewell to my parents, jumped into the carriage, and was whirled away with great rapidity.

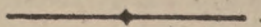
Charles looked pale and sad, and was not loquacious. I wanted him to talk—to speak of Lilian—but he carefully avoided any allusion to her. I was dying to know how he had left her, but would not question him on the subject. I inquired how he had left the family, however, and he replied:

"Indifferently well."

"Well," sighed I to myself, "she loves another, so why should I care?"

Half-past seven, and the rushing, rolling, rumbling cars were bearing us swiftly away. Fifteen minutes more, and the city of our nativity had faded from our view, perhaps forever.

We were speeding onward—thirty miles per hour—westward, ho! for Oregon.



CHAPTER III.

PROVIDENTIAL ESCAPES.



TEAMBOATS and railroads! what mighty inventions! With what startling velocity do they hurry us along, until even the overcharged mind almost feels it lacks the power to keep pace with their progress. Whoever has passed over the Boston and Providence route to New York will understand me. One mile-post succeeds another with a rapidity almost incredible; and ere he, who travels it for the first time, is aware that half the distance is completed, he finds himself in view of the capital of old Rhode Island.

So it was with myself. I had never been from home, and knew little of the speed with which the adventurer is carried across this mighty continent. I had heard men speak of it, it is true; but I had never realized it till now. Perhaps I was longer on the road than I imagined. When the heart is full, we take but little note of external objects, or the flight of time—time, which is bearing us on to the great ocean of eternity. My mind was oppressed and busy. I was thinking of home—of fond parents I had left behind—and of all the joys of childhood, which I could never witness again. A thousand things, a thousand scenes, which I had never thought of before, now crowded my brain with a vividness that startled me. They were gone now—forever gone! I had bid them a last adieu. With one bold leap I had thrown off youth and become a man—a man to think and act for myself. My collegiate days, too, were over—days which memory now recalled with sad and painful feelings.

True, my playmate, my fellow-student, my chum, my *friend*, was by my side. But he, too, was sad and thoughtful. He, too, was thinking of home and friends, the domestic, happy fireside, and all that he had left behind. His wonted gayety, his great flow of spirits,

his enthusiasm, were gone ; and he was silent now—dumb as a carved image in marble.

I gazed upon him, and my thoughts grew heavier, sadder. He was now so like Lilian—sweet, loved, but ah ! discarded Lilian ! How could I avoid thinking of her, when I gazed upon the pale, sad features of her only brother ! I *did* think of her ; of how I had left her ; and now that miles were gaining between us, I bitterly accused myself of injustice. Why did I leave her so abruptly and in such a condition ? My heart smote me. I had wronged her—wronged her at the moment of parting, and put reparation out of my power. Why had I done so ? Why did I not part with her as a friend ? If she did not love me, it was not her fault, and I had no right to abuse her. I had acted hastily, imprudently, unjustly. I knew it—I *felt* it—felt it keenly ; and, oh ! what would I have not sacrificed for one, even one, moment with her, to sue for pardon ! Alas ! alas ! my reflections on my conduct had come too late—too late !

Thus I thought, and thus I felt, while time and progress were alike unnoted, uncared for. What cared I now for time ? what cared I now for speed ? My mind was a hell of torture almost beyond endurance, and I only sought to escape from myself, but sought in vain.

“Passengers for the steamboat,” were the first sounds that aroused me from a painful reverie.

I looked up with a start, and lo ! I was in the heart of the city, and hundreds were around me. The cars had ceased their motion, and one destination was gained. At first I could not credit my senses. There must be some mistake—we were in the wrong city ! But I was soon convinced of my error ; and found, alas ! that all was too truly, too coldly, correct ; for on the impulse of the moment, I had counted on a return to my native soil, and—and—I will not say what else.

I roused up my friend—who also looked wonderingly about him, as if suddenly awakened from a dream, and heaved a long, deep sigh—a dirge to buried scenes and friends away. Mechanically we entered a carriage,

were hurried to the boat, and soon were gliding over the deep blue waters of Long Island Sound.

Early the next morning I beheld, for the first time, the lofty spires of that great Babylon of America, ycleped New York. What a place of business, bustle and confusion! What hurrying to and fro! What rushing, scrambling, crowding, each bent on his own selfish end, and caring nothing for his neighbor, but all for his neighbor's purse! How cold the faces of the citizens seem to a stranger! There are no welcome smiles—no kind greetings—all are wrapped up in their own pursuits; and he feels at once, although surrounded by thousands, that he is now indeed alone, without a friend, save such as can be *bought*.

On the ocean, on the prairie, or in the forest, man is not alone; he does not feel alone; for he is with Nature in all her wildness—in all her beauty; and she ever has a voice, which reaches his inner heart, and, in sweet companionship, whispers him to behold her wonders, and, through her, look up to the Author of all—her God and his! But in the great city it is different—vastly different. Here all is artificial, studied and cold; and as we gaze upon the thousands that throng the streets, and mark the selfish expressions on the faces of each, we feel an inward loathing, a disgust for mankind, and long to steal away to some quiet spot and commune with our own thoughts in silence.

Such were my reflections, as the rumbling vehicle whirled me over the pavements to that then prince of hotels (in name and wealth at least), the Astor House. True, I had been born and brought up in a city; but still these matters had never before forced themselves so strongly upon my mind as now. I was a stranger in a strange city, and, with my otherwise misanthropic feelings, I doubly felt them in all their force.

The window of the apartment assigned to me at the Astor House looked out upon that world-renowned thoroughfare, Broadway. Dinner over, I seated myself at the casement and gazed forth. What a world in miniature was spread before my eyes! What a whirlpool of confusion and excitement! Before me, a little to my

left, was the park—its trees beautifully decorated with the flowers and leaves of spring, and its many winding walks thronged with human beings. From out its center rose the City Hall—the hall of justice. Along one side ran Broadway—along the other, Park Row—both crowded with carriages of all descriptions, from the splendid vehicle of fashion, with its servants in livery, and its silver-trimmed harness, down to the common dray—crowded with footmen, from the prince to the beggar—all hurrying and jostling together. Here sauntered the lady and gentleman of fashion, robed in the most costly apparel money could procure, bedecked with diamonds and gold, sapphire and ruby; there, side by side, on the same pavement, almost touching them, strolled the poor, forlorn, pale-faced, hollow-eyed mendicant, partially clothed in filthy rags, and perhaps actually dying for a morsel of food. Great Heaven! what a comment on humanity!

I have mentioned only the extremes; but fancy both sexes—of all grades, sizes and nations between—and you have a picture which no city on the American continent save New York can present.

The evening found my friend and myself at the National Theater—then new, splendidly decorated, and in successful operation. It was crowded almost to suffocation with the *elite* of the city. Rounded arms, splendid busts, flashing jewels, glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes, were displayed on every hand in a bewitching light.

But of these I took little note. My attention was fixed upon the play. It was that impassioned creation of Shakespeare—Romeo and Juliet. My mind was just in a condition to feel the burning words of the lovers in all their force; and I concentrated my whole soul upon it, listened to every word, and watched every motion, to the exclusion of everything else.

The first and second acts were over, and the last scene of the third, the parting between the lovers, was on the stage. A breathless silence reigned around. Every eye was fixed upon the players—every head inclined a little forward, to catch the slightest tones of the

speakers. Already had the ardent and unfortunate Romeo sighed forth the tender words,

“Farewell ! I will omit no opportunity
That may convey my greetings, love, to thee ;”

and the answer of Juliet,

“Oh think'st thou we shall ever meet again ?”

was even trembling on her lips—when, suddenly, to the consternation and horror of all, there arose the terrific cry of,

“Fire ! fire !—the theater is on fire !”

Heavens ! what a scene ensued—and what feelings came over me ! Never shall I forget either. In a moment all was frightful confusion, as each sought to gain the street. Startling shrieks, appalling yells, and hideous groans, resounded on all sides. Hundreds, I might say thousands, rushed pell-mell to the doors, to escape the devouring element, which, already lapping the combustible scenery, was seen shooting upward its lurid tongues, and heard hissing, snapping and crackling, in its rapid progress over the devoted building.

I grasped the arm of my friend, crying, “Rush, Charley, for your life !” and sprung forward myself.

The next moment I felt myself seized from behind, and the voice of my friend shouted in my ear :

“Hold ! Frank—we must save her !”

“Whom ?”

“Yonder ! See ! they have crowded her back !—and now—great God ! she has fallen over into the pit !”

I looked in the direction indicated by the finger of Huntly, and beheld a beautiful female, vainly struggling to reach the door. As he spoke, a sudden rush forward crowded her back to the railing which divided her from the excited mass of beings in the pit. One moment she balanced on the railing, and the next, with a cry of horror, fell upon the heads of those below. At any other time she would have been cared for ; but now all were wild with terror, and thought only of themselves ;

and instead of seeking to aid, they allowed her to sink under their feet. Save my friend and I, no one seemed to heed her. With a cry of horror, I leaped forward to rescue her from a horrible death. But my friend was already before me. One bound, and Charles Huntly was among the wedged and shrieking mass below, exerting all his strength to reach the prostrate form of the lady, who was now being trod to death under the feet of the frantic multitude. I would have sprung over the railing myself, but I saw it would be useless; one was better than two; and I paused and watched the progress of my friend with an anxiety better imagined than described.

So dense was the mass, so closely wedged, that for a time all the efforts of Huntly to reach the unfortunate creature were vain; while the glaring light, and the roar of the flames, as they eagerly leaped forward to the dome overhead, rendered the scene truly dismal and awful.

At length the crowd grew thinner, as it poured through the open doorway, and, renewing his exertions, my friend shortly gained the side of the unknown. He stooped down to raise her, and I trembled for his safety, for I saw numbers fairly pressing upon him. With a Herculean effort, that must have exhausted all his physical powers, I beheld him rise to his feet, with the fair unknown seemingly lifeless in his arms. I uttered a cry of joy, as he staggered toward me with his burden.

"Quick! quick! this way—give her here!" I shouted, bending over the railing and extending my arms toward her.

Huntly staggered forward, and the next moment my grasp was upon her, and she was in my arms.

"Fly! Frank—fast—for God's sake! and give her air!" gasped Huntly, in a faint, exhausted tone.

I cast one glance at her pale, lovely features, on which were bruises and spots of blood, and then clambered over the seats to the door, bidding my friend follow, but looking not behind.

The boxes were now empty, and the doors but slightly blocked, so that I had little difficulty, to use a stage expression, in making my exit. The street, however, was

crowded with those just escaped, and others attracted hither by the alarm of fire. All was excitement and dismay.

I pushed my way through the crowd as best I could, with my lovely burden in my arms, and at length reached the opposite sidewalk, where I paused to rest, and, if possible, restore the fair one to consciousness. As I began chafing her temples, I heard a female voice shriek, in agonizing tones :

“Good God ! will no one save my child—my only child—my daughter—the idol of my heart !”

I glanced around me, and beheld, by the light of the burning building, a middle-aged lady, richly clad, only a few paces distant, violently wringing her hands, in mental agony, and looking imploringly, now at the already trembling structure, and then into the faces of the bystanders, as if in search of an answer to her heart-rending appeal.

“Oh, God ! oh, God ! save her ! save her !—she must not, shall not, die ! I will give thousands for her life !”

A thought struck me. Perhaps she was the mother of the senseless being I held ; and instantly I raised her in my arms and hurried forward.

“Is this your daughter, lady ?” I cried, as I drew near her.

She looked wildly about her—one painful glance—and then, with a shriek, sprung forward, threw her arms around the fair creature’s neck, and burst into tears.

“My God ! I thank Thee !” were the first articulate words from her now quivering lips. “I have got my daughter again !” and snatching her from my arms, she pressed kiss after kiss upon her lips, with all the wild, passionate fondness of a mother. “Ha ! is she dead ?” she cried, with a look of horror, appealing to me.

“Only fainted,” was my reply, made at a venture, for I dared not confirm my own fears.

“Yes ! yes ! God be praised !—I see ! I see ! She is returning to consciousness. But this blood?—these bruises?”

“A slight fall,” I answered.

“And you, sir—you?—I promised thousands to him

who should save her! Here is a part, and my card. Call to-night, or to-morrow, at —— (I failed to catch the address), and the remainder shall be yours."

"I did not save her for money; in fact, I did not save her at all—it was my friend," I replied, taking from her extended hand the card, but refusing the purse which it also contained.

"And where is your friend?" she asked, breathlessly.

Heavens! what a shock her words produced! Where was my friend, indeed! I looked hurriedly around, among the swaying multitude, but saw nothing of Charles Huntly. A terrible thought seized me. Perhaps he had not made his escape! I cast one glance at the burning pile, and, to my consternation, beheld the flames already bursting from the roof. Had he escaped?—and if not—*if not!*—great God, what a thought! I waited to say, to hear, no more; but turned and rushed into the swaying mass, shouting the name of my school-mate. No answer was returned. I shouted louder—but still heard not his well-known voice. Great God! what feelings came over me! pen cannot describe them. Onward, onward, still I pressed onward, and shouted at every step—but, alas! no answer.

At length I reached the door of the theater leading to the boxes. It was filled with smoke, pressing outward, through which I could catch glimpses of the devouring flames, and hear their awful roar. One pause—an instant only—and with his name upon my lips I darted into the shaking building.

I gained the boxes, and found the heat of the flames almost unbearable. They had already reached the railing nearest the stage, and overhead had eaten through the roof, from which burning cinders were dropping upon the blazing benches in the pit. The smoke was stifling, and I could scarcely breathe. I looked down, where I had last seen my friend, and beheld a dark object on the floor. I called Huntly by name, in a voice of agony. Methought the object stirred, and I fancied I heard a groan. The next moment I was in the pit, bending over the object. Gracious God! it was Huntly! For some cause he had not been able to escape.

Instantly I raised him in my arms, and, with a tremendous effort, threw him into the boxes. I attempted to follow, but failed. The smoke was proving too much for me, and the heat becoming intense. Again I tried, with like success. I began to feel dizzy, and faint, and thought I was perishing. I sunk back and looked up at the roof. I could see it trembling. A few moments, and it would be upon me. God of Heaven! what a death!

At this moment of despair I felt a current of air rushing in upon me. It revived me, and I made a third attempt to clamber into the boxes. Joy! joy! I succeeded. I caught hold of Charles, and, with my remaining strength, dragged him to the door, and into the open air. Some five or six persons now rushed to my assistance, and in another moment I had gained the opposite side of the street. As I did so, I heard a thundering noise behind me. I turned quickly round, and no pen can describe my feelings when I understood the cause. The roof of the building had fallen in, and bright sheets of flame, and burning cinders, were shooting upward to the dark pall of the arching heavens. I had just escaped with my life; and if ever I uttered a prayer of sincere gratitude to the Author of my being, it was then.

As I stood gazing upon the remainder of the structure, I saw the walls totter; and ere I had time to move from the spot, the front wall crushed down, with a thundering sound, and lay a pile of smoking ruins—a part falling inward and a part outward. The heat was now excessive; and as I sought to bear my unconscious friend further from the fire, the side walls plunged inward, leaving only the back wall standing. This now seemed to waver—totter—and then, great Heaven! it fell outward upon an adjoining building, crushing in the roof, and, as I afterwards learned, killing one of its inmates almost instantly.

By this time Huntly had begun to revive, and in a few minutes he was comparatively restored—the smoke and his exertions only having overcome him. He stared around him for a moment in wonder, and then seemed

to comprehend all. Grasping my hand, with a nervous pressure, he exclaimed :

"Thank God ! we are all saved ; though I thought all was over with me. I see, dear Frank, I owe all to you. But the lady, Frank ?"

"I left her safe in the arms of her mother."

"Thank God again for that ! But who is she ? and where does she live ?" And I felt the grasp of Charles tighten upon my arm.

"I do not know—but I have her mother's card here."

"Quick ! quick ! give it to me !" cried Huntly, with an impatience that surprised me.

But I was mistaken ; I had not the card ; it was lost ; and, with it, all clue to the persons in question. With an expression of deep and painful disappointment my friend turned away.

"But we may yet find them," I said ; "they were here a few minutes since."

"Where, Frank ? where ?"

"Yonder ;" and I hastened to the spot where I had left them ; but to the disappointment of myself, as well as Huntly, they were gone.

I made inquiries of all around ; but nobody had seen or knew anything of them.

"Always my luck, Frank," said my friend, with a sigh ; and, jumping into a hack, we were shortly set down at the steps of the Astor.

That night I dreamed of fire—of rescuing Lilian Huntly from the flames.

Early the next morning we were once more upon our long journey—swiftly speeding toward the far, Far West.



CHAPTER IV.

INCIDENTS OF THE JOURNEY.



T was a calm, beautiful day that found myself and friend on the hurricane deck of a magnificent steamer, gliding swiftly down the calm, silvery waters of that winding, lovely and romantic stream, the Ohio, or La Belle Riviere. We had passed through Philadelphia, Baltimore and Pittsburg, without stopping, and were now speeding over the waters of this river on our journey to the Far West. Never had I seen a stream before so fascinating in all its attractions. On my right was the State of Ohio—on my left, those of Virginia and Kentucky; and, on either hand, beautiful villages, farms and pleasure grounds, with tree, blade and flower in the delightful bloom of a pleasant spring. Here was a hill clothed with trees, reaching even to, overhanging and mirroring its green form in the glassy tide; there a smiling plain, stretching gracefully away from the river's bank, teeming with the growing products of the husbandman; while yonder a thriving village, a green and flowery lawn, or a pleasant farmhouse, rendered the whole scene picturesque and lovely beyond description.

The longer I gazed, the more I felt my spirits revive, until I began to resume something of the joyousness of by-gone days. A similar effect I could perceive was beginning to tell upon my friend. The first keen pang of leaving home was becoming deadened. We were now in a part of the world abounding with everything delightful, and felt that our adventures had really begun. We thought of home and friends occasionally, it is true; but then it was only occasionally; and, mingling with our feelings, were thoughts of the present and glorious anticipations for the future. We were strong, in the very prime of life, and bound on a journey of adventure, where everything, being entirely new, was calculated to

withdraw our minds from the scenes we had bid adieu. The future is always bright to the imagination of the young and inexperienced ; and we looked forward with delight to scenes on and beyond the broad and mighty prairies of the seemingly boundless West.

"Well, Frank," said Huntly, at length, with something of his former light-hearted air, "what think you of this?"

"It is superlatively beautiful!" I exclaimed, with enthusiasm.

"I agree with you there, Frank," he replied ; "but then this will all sink into insignificance when we come to behold what lies beyond the bounds of civilization. Oh, I am in raptures with my journey ! What a beautiful land is this West ! I do not wonder that emigration sets hitherward, for it seems to be the Paradise of earth."

"Ay, it does indeed."

"But I say, Frank, there is one thing we have overlooked."

"Well, Charley, what is it?"

"Why, we must engage a servant to look after our baggage ; and so let us employ one with whom we can have a little sport. I am dying for a hearty laugh."

"But that may not be so easy to do," said I.

"Pshaw ! don't you believe a word of it. Now I have been standing here for the last ten minutes, laying my plans, and if you have no objection I will try and put them in operation."

"None at all," I returned ; "but let me hear them first."

"Do you see that fellow yonder, Frank?" pointing to a rather green-looking specimen of the Emerald Isle.

"I do. Well?"

"Well, I am going to try him ; so come along and see the result ;" and with this Huntly strode to the stern of the boat, where the son of Erin was standing, with his arms crossed on his back, gazing around him with an air of wondering curiosity.

He was a good specimen of an Irishman, and bore all the marks of fresh importation. His coat was a wool-

mixed gray, with bright, metal buttons, and very short skirts. His trousers were made of a greenish fustian, the upper portion of which barely united with a reddish-brown vest. Heavy brogans encased his feet; and a hat, with a rim of an inch in width, all the worse for wear, beneath which his sandy hair came low upon his brow, covered his head. A large mouth, pug nose, ruddy cheeks, and bright, cunning, gray eyes, denoted courage, wit and humor; and, being a strong, hearty fellow, he was just the one to suit us.

"Well, Pat, a handsome country this!" said Huntly, in a familiar tone, as he came up to him.

"Troth, now, ye may well say that same, your honor, barring the name of Pat, which isn't mine at all, at all, but simply Teddy O'Lagherty jist," replied the Hibernian, with great volubility, in the real, rolling Irish brogue, touching his hat respectfully.

"Beg your pardon, Teddy!—though I suppose it makes little difference to you what name you get?"

"Difference, is it, ye're spaking of? To the divil wid ye now, for taking me for a spalpeen! D'ye be afther thinking, now, I don't want the name that me mother's grandfather, that was a relation to her, barring that he wasn't her grandfather at all, but only her daddy, give me?"

"Oh, well then, never mind—I will call you Teddy," said Charles, laughing, and winking at me. "But I say, Teddy, where are you bound?"

"Bound, is it, ye're axing? Och! I'm not bound at all, at all—but frae as the biped of a chap ye calls a toad!"

"'A fellow of infinite jest; I like him much,'" said Huntly to me, aside, with a smile. "I must secure him—eh, Frank?"

"Certainly, by all means," I replied, in the same manner; "'for his like we ne'er may see again.'"

"But if you are not bound, Teddy," continued Huntly, addressing the Irishman, "pray tell me whither you are going?"

"Faith, now, ye've jist axed a question which mesilf has put to Teddy O'Lagherty more'n fifty times, widout gitting a single straight answer."

"Then I suppose you are, like us, on a journey of adventure?"

"It's like I may be, for divil of a thing else me knows about it."

"Would you like to get employment?"

"Would a pig like to ate his suppher?" answered Teddy, promptly.

"How would you like to engage with us now?"

"Troth, I've done many a worse thing, I'm thinking, your honor."

"No doubt of it, Teddy."

"But what d'yees want of me, your honor—and where to go?—for I'm liking travel, if it's all the same to yees."

"So much the better, for we are bound on a long journey;" and Charles proceeded to explain our intentions, and in what capacity the other would be wanted.

"Och!" cried Teddy, jumping up and cracking his heels with delight, to our great amusement; "it's that same I'd be afther saaking if ye'd a axed me what I wanted."

"Think you can shoot Indians, eh! Teddy?"

"Shoot, is it? Faith, I can shoot anything that flies on two legs. Although I says it mesilf, what shouldn't, but let me mother for me, I'm the greatest shooter yees iver knew, I is."

"Indeed! I'm glad to hear it, Teddy, for I presume we shall have plenty of shooting to do. But what did you ever kill, Teddy?"

"Kill, is it! Troth, now, ye're afther heading me wid your cunning."

"Well, then, what did you shoot?"

"A two-legged bir-r-d, your honor."

"Well, you killed it, of course?"

"Killed it! Agh! now ye're talking. Faith, it wouldn't die. I shot it as plain as daylight, right for-nest the back-bone of its spine; and, would ye belave it, divil of a shot touched it, at all, at all—the ugly baast that it was."

"Well, well, Teddy, I think you will do," said Huntly,

laughing; and forthwith he proceeded to close the bargain with the Irishman.

Our trip proved very delightful, and in due time we arrived at Cincinnati, where it was our design to spend at least a day.

It was a beautiful morning when we rounded the first bend above the city and beheld the spires of this great western mart glittering in the sunbeams. The levee we found lined with boats and crowded with drays, hacks and merchandise, and everything bespoke the life and briskness of immense trade.

Taking rooms at the Broadway Hotel, we sauntered forth to view the city, and evening found us well pleased with our day's ramble.

It was about eleven o'clock on the night succeeding our arrival, that, having returned from a concert, we were preparing to retire to rest, when the alarm of fire, accompanied by a bright light, which shone in at our windows, attracted our attention.

"Ha! here is another adventure, Charley!" I exclaimed, replacing my coat, which I was in the act of taking from my shoulders. "Come, once more forth, and let us see what we can discover that is new and startling—for to-morrow, you know, we leave."

"Not to-night, Frank," answered Huntly, yawning and rubbing his eyes. "I'-faith, man, I've seen enough of fire to last me for a long time; and oh, (yawning again) I'm so sleepy!"

"Then I will go alone."

"Well, go; for myself, I'll to bed and dream about it. But I say, Frank," pursued Huntly, as I was on the point of quitting the room, "have you secured your pistols about you?"

"No."

"You had better."

"Pshaw! I do not want them: I am not going to fight."

"Nevertheless you had better go armed, in a strange place like this."

"Nonsense!" I replied, closing the door and hurrying down to the street.

A thought struck me, that I would take Teddy along ; but, upon second consideration, I resolved to go alone.

There was but little difficulty in finding the fire ; for a bright flame, shooting upward to the dark canopy above, guided me to it. Passing up Broadway to Sixth street, I turned down some four or five blocks, and discovered the fire to be issuing from an old, two-story, wooden building, which had been tenanted by two or three families of the poorer class.

At the moment when I arrived, four engines were in active play, and some two or three others were preparing to join them. The water was not thrown upon the burning building—for that was already too far gone—but upon one or two others that nearly joined, which were smoking from the heat. Many household articles had been thrown into the street, and these were surrounded by the fire-watch ; while an Irishman and his wife, with a daughter of sixteen, were running to and fro, and lamenting in piteous tones the loss of their home and property.

“Och, honey, don't be despairing now !” said a voice, which I fancied I recognized ; and turning toward the speaker, to my astonishment I beheld Teddy in the laudable act of consoling the afflicted damsel.

“Teddy !” I shouted.

“Here, your honor,” returned the Hibernian, looking around in surprise, and then advancing to me with an abashed air.

“What are you doing here, Teddy ?” I continued. “I thought you were at the hotel, sound asleep.”

“Faith ! and it's like I thought the same of your honor, barring the slaap,” rejoined the Irishman, scratching his head. “I saan the fire, your honor, and I thought as maybe there'd be some famales that 'ud naad consoling ; and so, ye see, I gathered mesilf hitherward as fast as me trotters would let me.”

“And so you make it your business to console females, eh ?” I asked, with a smile, which I could not repress.

“Faith, now,” answered Teddy, “if it's all the same

to yourself, your honor, I'm a female man, barring the dress they wears."

"Well, well," said I, laughing outright, in spite of myself, "go on with your good work—but mind you are at your post betimes in the morning, or you will be left behind."

"It's meself that'll not forget that same," answered the other, as he turned away to rejoin the party in distress.

At this moment I felt myself rudely jostled from behind, and, turning quickly round, found myself hemmed in by a crowd, in which two men were fighting.

I endeavored to escape, and, in doing so, accidentally trod on the foot of a stranger, who turned furiously upon me, with :

"What in blazes do you mean?"

"An accident," said I, apologetically.

"You're a liar!" he rejoined; "you did it a purpose."

I never was remarkable for prudence at any time, or I should have been more cautious on the present occasion. But the insulting words of the stranger made my young blood boil until I felt its heat in my face. Without regard to consequences, and ere the words had fairly escaped his lips, I struck him so powerful a blow in the face that he fell back upon the ground.

"Another fight!" cried a dozen voices at once: "Another fight! hurrah!"

In a moment I regretted what I had done, but it was too late. I would have escaped, but the crowd had now formed around me so densely that escape was impossible. Besides, my antagonist, regaining his feet, his face covered with blood, was now advancing upon me furiously. There was no alternative; and watching my opportunity, as he came up, I dexterously planted the second blow exactly where I had the first, and down he went again.

"A trump, by Jupiter!" "Give it to him, stranger!" "He's a few!" were some of the expressions which greeted me from the delighted by-standers.

But I had a short time to enjoy my triumph—if such a display of physical powers may be termed a triumph—for the next moment I beheld my adversary again ap-

proaching, but more warily than before, and evidently better prepared for the combat. I was not considered a bad pugilist for one of my age, nor did I in general fear one of my race; but as I gazed upon my advancing foe, I will frankly own that I trembled for the result. He was a powerfully-built man, six feet in stature, had a tremendous arm, and an eye that would quail before nothing mortal.

"Young chap," he exclaimed, with an oath, as he came up, "you've done what nobody else has for years. Take that, and see how you'll like it;" and with the word he threw all his strength into a blow that fell like a sledge hammer.

I saw it, and prepared to ward it. I did so, partially, but its force broke my guard, and his double-jointed fist, alighting upon my head, staggered me back and brought me to my knees. With all the suppleness of which I was master, I sprung to my feet, only to receive another blow, which laid me out upon the flinty pavement. For a moment I was stunned and confused; but, regaining my senses and feet, I prepared to renew the contest.

"I say, stranger," said my antagonist, motioning his hand for a parley, "you're good blood, but you h'ain't got quite enough of the metal to cope with me. You're only a boy yit, and so just consider yourself licked, and go home, afore I git cantankerous and hurt you a few."

But I was not in a condition to take his advice. True, I was bruised and fatigued, and should have rested satisfied to let the affair end thus. But my worst passions had now got the better of my reasoning powers. I fancied I had been insulted, disgraced, and that nothing but victory or death could remove the stigma. I saw some of the spectators smile, and some look pityingly upon me, and this decided my course of action. My temper rose, my eyes flashed, and my cheeks burned, as I thought of the insulting words of the other.

"Some men live by bullying," I replied, pointedly; "and I suppose *you* are one of such; if not, you will keep your advice till one of us is the victor."

My opponent looked upon me with a mingled expression of surprise and rage.

"Fool!" he cried; "do you dar' me again to the fight? Well, then, I'll whip you this time or die!"

"Make your words good!" I retorted, springing forward and pretending to aim a blow at his head.

Instead of striking with my fist, however, I only made a feint, and, doubling with great dexterity, took him with my head just below the pit of the stomach, and hurled him over backward upon the ground. He threw out his hand, caught me as he fell, and drew me upon him.

Now came the contest in earnest. I had a slight advantage in being uppermost; but, throwing his arms around, he strove to turn me. I seized him by the throat, and clung there with the tenacity of a bull-dog to his victim. He made a desperate effort to bring me under, but still I maintained my position. The force of my grasp now began to tell upon him. He strangled, and I could sensibly perceive he was growing weaker. At length, just as I was about to relax my hold, for fear of choking him to death, he suddenly threw up one hand, buried it in my hair, twined a long lock around his finger, and the next moment placed his thumb to my eye, with a force that seemed to start the ball from its socket.

Great Heaven! what a feeling of horror came over me! I was about to lose an eye—be disfigured for life. Death, I fancied, was preferable to this; and instantly releasing his throat, I seized his hand with both of mine. This was exactly what he desired; and the next moment I found myself whirled violently upon my back on the rough pavement, and my antagonist uppermost. I attempted to recover my former advantage, but in vain. My adversary was by far too powerful a man. Grasping my throat with one hand, with such a pressure that everything began to grow dark, he partly raised himself, planted a knee upon my breast, and with the other hand drew a long knife. I just caught a glimmer of the blade, as he raised it to give me a fatal stab; but I was too exhausted and overmastered to make any resistance; and I closed my eyes in despair, and felt that all was over.

Suddenly I heard the voice of Teddy, shouting:

"To the divil wid ye, now, for a bothering spalpeen, that ye is!" and at the same moment I felt the grasp of my opponent leave my throat and his weight my body.

With my remaining strength I rose to a sitting posture, and found Teddy dancing around me, flourishing a hickory shillalah over his head in the scientific manner of his countrymen, and whooping, shouting and cursing in a way peculiar to himself.

By some means he had been made aware of my danger, and, like a noble fellow, had rushed into the crowd and felled my adversary with a blow so powerful that he still lay senseless upon the ground.

"And who are you that dares thus to interfere?" cried a voice in the crowd, which found immediate echo with a dozen others.

"Who am I, ye blaggards?" roared Teddy. "Who should I be but a watchman doing me duthy? Come," he cried, seizing me by the collar, "yees'll git a lock-up the night for this blaggard business of disturbing the slumbers of honest paaple afore they've gone to bid, jist."

I saw his ruse at once, and determined to profit by it and make my escape. To do this I pretended that I was not the aggressor, and that it was very hard to be brought up before the mayor for a little harmless fun.

"Harmless fun!" roared the cunning Irishman. "D'yees call it harmless fun, now, to have your throat cut, ye scoundrel? Come along wid ye!" and he pretended to jerk me through the crowd, which gave way before him.

We had just got fairly clear of the mass, when we heard voices behind us shouting:

"Stop 'em! stop 'em!—he's no watch."

"Faith, they're afther smelling the joke whin it's too late," said Teddy. "But run, your honor, or the divils will be howld of us."

I needed no second prompting; and with the aid of the Irishman, who partially supported me, for I was still weak, I darted down a dark and narrow street.

For a short distance we heard the steps of pursuers behind us; but gradually one after another gave up the chase, until at last we found our course left free.

It would be impossible for me to picture the joy I felt at my escape, or my gratitude toward my deliverer. Turning to the Irishman, I seized his hand, while my eyes filled with tears.

"Teddy," I said, "you have saved my life, and I shall not soon forget it."

"Troth, your honor," replied Teddy, with a comical look, "it was wor-r-th presarving—for it's the best and ounly one yees got."

I said no more, but silently slipped a gold coin into his hand.

"Sure and how smooth it makes a body's hands to be butthered!" observed the Irishman, as he carefully hid the coin in his pocket.

Deep was the sympathy of Huntly for me, when, arrived at the hotel, I detailed what had occurred in my absence; and as deep his gratitude to the preserver of my life.

"Frank," he exclaimed, grasping my hand, "henceforth you go not alone, in the night, in a strange city."

The next day, though stiff and sore from my bruises, I found myself gliding down the Ohio on a splendid steamer, bound for St. Louis, where in due time we all arrived without accident or event worthy of note.

CHAPTER V.

THE PRAIRIE AND THE TRAPPERS.



HE prairie! the mighty, rolling, and seemingly boundless prairie! With what singular emotions I beheld it for the first time! I could compare it to nothing but a vast sea, changed suddenly to earth, with all its heaving, rolling billows. Thousands upon thousands of acres lay spread before me like a map, bounded by nothing but the deep, blue sky. What a magnificent sight! A sight

that made my soul expand with lofty thought, and its frail tenement sink into utter nothingness before it. Talk of man—his power, his knowledge, his *greatness*—what is he? A mere worm, an insect, a mote, a nothing, when brought in compare with the grand, the sublime, in nature. Go, take the mighty one of earth—the crimson-robed, diamond-decked monarch, whose nod is law, and whose arrogant pride tells him he rules the land and sea—take him, bring him hither, and place him in the center of this ocean of land—far, far beyond the sounds of civilization—and what does he become? Talk to him then of his power, his greatness, his glory; tell him his word is law—to command and he shall be obeyed; remind him of his treasures, and tell him now to try the power of gold! What would be the result? He would deeply feel the mockery of your words, and the nothingness of all he once valued; for, alas! they would lack the power to guide, to feed, or save him from the thousand dangers of the wilderness.

Similar to these were my thoughts, as I stood alone, upon a slight rise of ground, and overlooked miles upon miles of the most lovely, the most sublime, scene I had ever beheld. Wave upon wave of land, if I may be allowed the expression, stretched away on every hand, covered with beautiful, green prairie-grass and the blooming wild flowers of the wilderness. Afar in the distance I beheld a drove of buffaloes quietly grazing; in another direction a stampede of wild horses, rushing onward with the velocity of the whirling car of modern days; nearer, I occasionally caught glimpses of various other animals; while flocks of birds, of beautiful plumage, skimming over the surface, here and there alighting, or starting up from the earth, gave the enchantment of life and variety to the picture.

It had been a beautiful day, and the sun was now just burying himself in the far-off ocean of blue, and his golden rays were streaming along the surface of the waving grass and tinging it with a delightful hue. Occasionally some elevated point, like the one on which I stood, caught for a moment his fading rays, and shone like a ball of golden fire. Slowly he took

his diurnal farewell—as if loth to quit a scene so lovely—and at last hid himself from my view beyond the western horizon. Then a bright, golden streak shot up toward the darkening dome of heaven, and, widening on either hand, gradually became sweetly blended with the cerulean blue. Then this slowly faded, and took a more crimson color; then more purple; until, at last, a faint tinge showed the point where the sun had disappeared, while the stars began to appear in the gray vault above.

I had stood and marked the whole change with that poetical feeling of pleasant sadness which a beautiful sunset rarely fails to awaken in the breast of the lover of nature. I noted every change that was going on, and yet my thoughts were far, far away, in my native land. I was thinking of the hundreds of miles that separated me from the friends that I loved. I was recalling the delight with which I had, when a boy, viewed the farewell scenes of day from some of the many romantic hills of old New England. I pictured the once cheerful home of my parents, which I had forsaken, and which now peradventure was cheerful no longer in consequence of my absence. I fancied I could see my mother move to the door, with a slow step and heavy heart, and gaze with maternal affection toward the broad and mighty West, and sigh, and wonder what had become of him who should have been the stay and support of her declining years. I thought, and I grew more sad as I thought, until tears filled my eyes.

Mother! what a world of affection is comprised in that single word! How little do we, in the giddy round of youthful pleasures and follies, heed her wise counsels! How lightly do we look upon that jealous care with which she guides our otherwise erring feet! and watches, with feelings which none but a mother can know, the gradual expansion of our youth to the riper years of discretion! We may not think of it then, but it will be recalled to us in after years, when the gloomy grave, or a fearful living separation, has placed her far beyond our reach, and her sweet voice of sympathy and consolation, for the various ills attendant upon us, sounds in our ear no more. How deeply then may we regret a

thousand deeds done contrary to her gentle admonitions! How deeply then may we sigh for those days once more, to retrieve what had been done amiss, and make her sweet heart glad with happiness. Alas! once gone, they can rarely be renewed, and we grow mournfully sad with the bitter reflection.

My mother—my dearly beloved mother—would I ever behold her again? Should I ever return to my native land, would I find her among the living? If not—*if not!* Heavens! what a sad, what a painful, thought! and instantly I found my eyes swimming in tears, and my frame trembling with nervous agitation. But I would hope for the best; I would not borrow trouble; and gradually I became calm. Then I thought of my father—of many other dear friends—and, lastly, though I strove to avoid it, I thought of Lilian—sweet, lost, but ah! dearly loved Lilian. I could see her gentle features—I could hear her plaintive voice—soft and silvery as running waters—and I sighed, a long, deep sigh, as I thought. Would I ever behold *her* again? I might, but—(my blood ran cold)—but—wedded to another.

“Ay! wedded to another!” I fairly groaned aloud, with a start that sent the red current of life swiftly through my veins.

I looked around me, and found it already growing dark. The beautiful scene I had so lately witnessed was now faded from my sight; and the gloomy howl of a distant pack of wolves reminded me that I was now beyond civilization, in the wilderness of an extensive prairie. I looked downward, and within a hundred yards of me beheld the fire of our first camp on the prairie, and with a hasty step I descended the eminence and joined my companions.

“Ah, Frank,” said Huntly, as I came up, “I was beginning to fear something had happened to you, and you can easily imagine my feelings! Why did you absent yourself so long?”

“I was on yonder eminence, enraptured with the glories of the sunset scene,” I replied, somewhat evasively.

“Ah, was it not a splendid sight?” he rejoined, en-

thusiastically, with sparkling eyes. "I too beheld it with rapture, and regretted that you were not by to sympathize with me in my poetical feelings. But come, supper is preparing, and so let us regale ourselves at once, and afterward take our first sleep in this magnificent wild."

As I said before, this was our first camp on the prairie. On our way hither we had joined a party of four hunters or trappers, and in consequence our number was now augmented to seven. We had thrown off the lighter and more costly apparel of the settlements, and were now costumed in the rougher garments worn by the hunters of the Rocky Mountains. This consisted of a frock or hunting-shirt, made of dressed buckskin, and ornamented with long and parti-colored fringes. Our nether garments were of the same material, ornamented in the same manner, and on our feet were moccasins. Round the waist of each was a belt, supporting a brace of pistols and a long knife, the latter in a sheath made of buffalo hide. A strip of leather, passing over our right shoulders, suspended our powder-horns and bullet-pouches under our left arms. In the latter we carried flint and steel, and small articles of various kinds, that had been mentioned as being useful where we procured our outfit. Among other things, we had taken care to secure plenty of ammunition, tobacco and pipes, together with an extra supply of apparel for the cold regions toward which we were journeying; all of which were snugly stored away in our large buffalo-skin wallets—called by the trappers "possibles," or "possible sacks"—which were either attached to or thrown across our saddles.

In the description just given, I have been speaking of our party alone—namely, Huntly, Teddy and myself—without regard to the trappers, who were costumed and equipped much like ourselves, with the exception that instead of horses their animals were mules, and instead of one apiece they had three. They, however, were bound on a regular trapping expedition, and carried their traps with them, and took along their mules for furs; while we, going merely on adventure, and not

speculation, had only taken the animals upon which we rode. Our horses and appendages, what we had, were all of the finest description ; and our long, silver-mounted rifles drew many a wistful look from our newly-made companions. Our chief object in joining them was to learn their habits and customs in the wilderness, before we ventured forth upon our own resources ; and by being somewhat liberal in supplying them with tobacco, and many small things of great value to the trapper, we secured their friendship and favor at once.

The trapper of the Rocky Mountains is a singular being. Like the boatman of the river, the sailor of the ocean, or the scout of the forest, he has peculiar characteristics, both as regards manners and dialect. Constantly exposed to danger and hardship, he becomes reckless of the one and indifferent to the other. His whole life, from beginning to end, is a constant succession of perilous adventures ; and so infatuated does he become with the excitement attendant upon these, that, confined in a settlement, he would literally pine to death for his free mountain air and liberty to roam.

There is no polish—no sickly, sentimental refinement in his manners and conversation ; but, on the contrary, all is rude, rough, blunt and to the point. When he says a thing, he means it ; and, in general, he has but little deceit. With death he becomes so familiar that all fear of the dread king of mortality is lost. True, he clings to life with great tenacity—but then there is no whimpering and whining at his fate. When he finds his time has come to go, he stands up like a man, and takes the result with the stoicism of a martyr. He is frequently a great boaster, and, like the sailor, delights in narrating strange tales of his wonderful adventures and hairbreadth escapes. In his outward behavior he is often sullen and morose ; but, as a general thing, his heart is in the right place. He will kill and scalp an Indian foe with the same indifference and delight that he would shoot a bear or deer, and yet you may trust your life and money in his hands with perfect safety. In fact, I may say, his whole composition is a strange compound

of odds and ends—of inexplicable incongruities—of good and evil.

Until within the last few days I had never seen a trapper, and of course he was to me and my companions as great an object of curiosity as would have been an aboriginal. The four which we had joined were genuine specimens of the mountaineers. Each had seen much service, had been more or less upon trapping expeditions, and one had actually grown gray in the hardy life of the wilderness. Each had trapped on his own account and for others; and each had scoured the whole vast country—from the upper regions of Oregon to the Mexican latitude—from the States to the Pacific Ocean. They were acquainted with the land in every direction—knew all the regularly organized fur companies—all the trading forts and stations—and consequently were just the men to initiate us into all the peculiarities of the wilderness, all the mysteries of the trapper's life, and excite our marvelous propensities by their startling and wonderful tales. They gloried in the *sobriquets* of Black George, Rash Will, Fiery Ned and Daring Tom—appellations which had been bestowed on them for some peculiar look in their persons or trait in their characters.

The first mentioned, Black George, was the eldest of the party, and had doubtless received his nickname from his dingy complexion, which was but little removed from the sable son of Africa. Naturally dark, his skin had become almost black from long exposure to the weather. In height he was fully six feet, gaunt and rawboned, with great breadth of shoulders, ponderous limbs and powerful muscles, which gave him a very formidable appearance. Although approaching sixty, his vigor seemed not the least impaired by age. His coarse hair, once black, was now an iron gray. His face was thin and long, with high cheek bones, pointed nose, hollow cheeks, large mouth, and cold, gray eyes. The wonted expression of his countenance was harsh and repulsive, though it was occasionally lighted with a humorous, benevolent smile. He was generally liked and respected by the whites, but hated and feared by the Indians, of

whom he was a mortal enemy that seldom failed to take their "hair"* whenever opportunity presented.

The next in order, Rash Will, as he was denominated, was a stout, heavy-built man, somewhat above the medium stature, and about forty years of age. He had a large, Roman nose and mouth, thick lips, low forehead and blue eyes. The general expression of his physiognomy was a blunt, straightforwardness, without regard to consequences. He could do a good deed or an evil one; and if he could justify the latter to himself, he cared not a straw for the opinions of others. Headstrong and violent when excited by anger, he had been the author of some dark deeds among the savages, which fully entitled him to the appellation of Rash Will.

The third in order, Fiery Ned, was about thirty-five years of age, of a robust, handsome form, some five feet ten inches in height, and fully developed in every part. His features were comely and prepossessing. The only marked points of his countenance were his eyes—which were small, black, restless and piercing—and his forehead, which was high and ample. His temperament was ardent, passionate and fiery. At times he was cool, frank and generous; but at others, especially in an Indian fight, he became wild, furious, and, in short, a perfect devil.

The last of the four, Daring Tom, was the youngest and the most to my liking of any. He was about thirty years of age, and of middling stature. Unlike his companions, his features were very fine, almost effeminate, with a mild, dignified expression, that instantly won the regard of all with whom he came in contact. He had a large, full, clear blue eye, which rarely varied its expression, be the circumstances what they might. Cool and collected at all times, he was never more so than when surrounded by imminent danger. There was no risk he would not run to serve a friend, and on no occasion had he ever been known to display the least sign of fear—hence was he called Daring Tom.

Such is an outline sketch of the trappers who had now

* Scalps.

become our companions ; and probably, take us all together, there was not, in the whole broad West, another party of the same number that could present a more formidable appearance, or perform greater feats in the heat of contest.

At the moment when I came up to the fire, each of the trappers was seated beside it on the ground, cross-legged, engaged in toasting slices of a fat buck, which one of them had killed and brought in not an hour before. They were talking away briskly all the while, telling some wonderful tale, or cracking some joke, to the great amusement of Teddy O'Lagherty, who, a little apart, was seated in a similar manner to themselves, and listening attentively, with mouth and eyes widely distended. A little distance from the fire our hopped animals were quietly cropping the luxuriant herbage beneath them.

"So then, Charley," I said, after having taken a general survey, "I suppose we are to fatten on deer meat?"

"Deer meat and salt," he replied, with a laugh. "The fancy preparations of civilization will regale us no longer, and we may be thankful if we always get fare as good as this."

While saying this, Huntly had drawn nearer to the fire, so that the last remark caught the ear of Black George, who was just on the point of enforcing some assertion with an oath, but who suddenly stopped short, and turned to him with a comical look.

"See heyar, young chap, didn't I hearn you say you was from Bosson, or some sich place in the States?"

"Doubtless," answered Huntly, "for that, I am proud to say, is my native city."

"Oh, it's a city, then? Big's St. Louey, hey?"

"Much larger."

"Do say. Why then it's some, I reckons."

"A very flourishing place."

"Hum! You was born to Bosson?"

"Ay, and bred there."

"Bread? Oh, that means you was foddered thar, I s'pose?"

"Yes, brought up and educated there."

"Eddicated—augh! Heyar's what never did that; never had no need on't; know how to shoot and trap, but can't make pot hooks; can't tell 'em when they is made; know they's some, though, and wouldn't mind I knowed 'em a few—but don't care much no how; couldn't live no longer for't; couldn't 'float my sticks' * no better I s'pect. Well, for a younker, you've had a right smart chance, and I s'pose know a heap.† Heyar's what's born way down to Arkansaw, on a swamp patch, that didn't yield nothin' worth divin' for. I's raised down thar—or bread, as you calls it, young Bosson, (s'pose you've got no objection to bein' called arter your native city)—though almighty poor bread I was, for I didn't git much on't for a spell—in faet till I'd nearly gone under‡ —augh! Let's see, whar was I? Oh, you's saying 'bout bein' thankful for sich fare's this. It tickled me a heap—*it* did—and I had to in'ardly hold on tight to my ribs to keep from guffawing. Why, young Bossoners, (addressing both of us) ef you'd seen what I hev, a piece like that thar, (pointing to the meat on the end of his stick, which he was toasting at the fire,) would a bin a heaven on arth, and no mistake! Talk about bein' thankful for sich fare's this! Wait till you've seed your hoss go under, and the last eend o' the eatable part o' your possibles chaw'r'd up, and then talk."

Here the old man paused and chuckled heartily, and winked at his companions, who joined him in his merriment, to the utter consternation of poor Teddy, who, with mouth wide open, and eyes enlarged to their utmost capacity, simply exclaimed:

"Murtheration now! what a baastly time on't yees had!"

"I suppose you have seen some very rough times?"

* That is, couldn't get along any better. This is a common expression among the trappers, and its meaning depends altogether upon the sense in which it is used. It is derived from their occupation. A "stick" is attached to each trap by a string, and if the beaver runs away with the trap, the stick, floating on the surface of the water, indicates the whereabouts of the animal, and enables the trapper to recover his property.

† A western word, equivalent to "very much."

‡ Died—another expression peculiar to the trapper.

I rejoined, anxious to draw the old man out in some of his wonderful tales of adventure.

"Wall, I has, hoss," was the quick response; "and ef you want to make folks stare in the States, you'd better jest jog down one I've a notion to tell."

"We shall all be eager listeners," I rejoined.

"Think you'd like to hear it, hey?"

"Oh, most certainly."

The old man smiled complacently, and stroked his beard in a way to denote that he felt himself somewhat complimented.

"Got any bacca?"

I gave him a large piece.

"Wall, plant yourselves down here, in talking distance, and, while this deer meat's a sizzling, I'll tell you a trump and an ace at that."

Huntly and myself at once seated ourselves upon the ground, as near the old man as possible, who, giving the weed a few extra turns in his mouth, began the following marvelous narration.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OLD TRAPPER'S TALE.



E see, strangers," said the old man, "or Bossoners (though I s'pect it don't make no partikelar difference what I calls ye, so it don't hurt your feelin's none), as I sez afore, I was raised down to Arkansaw, or tharabouts, and it's nigh on to sixty year now sence I fust tuk a center-shot at daylight, and in course I've forgot all the feelin's a fust sight gin me. Howsomever, that's nothin' here nor t'other. (I say, Will, *ef* you've got that thar bottle about you, I doesn't mind a taste, jest to grease this here bacca—augh! Thankee, Will; you're some, *you* is.)

"Wall, strangers, you needn't s'pect I'm a-goin' to gin

ye my whole hist'ry, case I isn't, and don't know's I could ef I wanted to, case most on't's forgot. So now I'll jest jump over a heap o' time, and come down to 'bout four year ago come next Feberry, when it was so all-fired cold it froze icykels on to the star rays, and stopped 'em comin' down; and the sun froze so he couldn't shine; and the moon didn't git up at all, *she* didn't; and this here arth was as dark as a stack o' black wild cats."

Here the Irishman, unable to stand it longer, roared out:

"Blatheration! ye're not spaking truth, now, Mистер Black George?"

"Ain't I, though?" answered the old trapper, gravely, silently tipping the wink to one of his companions. "D'ye think I'd lie about it? You remember the time, Will?"

"Wall, I does, hoss," replied Will, with a grin.

"In course ye does, and so does everybody that knowed anything 'bout it. I may hev exaggerted a leetle 'bout the stars and them things, but I jest tell ye what was fact and no mistake, and I'll be dog-gone ef I doesn't stake my v'racity on it's being true as preachin'!"

Here the old man made a pause.

"Well, well, go on!" cried I.

"Ay, ay!" echoed Huntly.

"Wall," said Black George, "a little drap more o' that critter—jest a taste—case the truth makes me so infarnal dry, you can't tell. Augh! thankee—(returning the bottle)—feel myself agin now. But let's see—whar was I?"

"You were speaking about the weather."

"So I was; that's a fact; I'll be dog-gone if I wasn't! Wall, as I's a-sayin', it got so cold that when you throwed water up in the air, it all froze afore it could git down, and acterly had to stay thar, case it froze right on to the atmospheric."

"On to what?"

"The atmospheric."

"What is that?"

"You doesn't know what atmospheric is? Wall, I'll be dog-gone ef I'm goin' to 'lighten nobody; much's I

ken do to understand for myself. But I knows the water froze to that thar article, for that's what I hearn a scholar call it, and I reckon he knowed a heap any how."

"Well, well, the story!" cried I.

"Yes; wall, I haint got through tellin' how cold it was yit. Not only the water froze to the atmospheric, but the animals as used to run o' nights all quit the business; and you could walk right up to one and pat him han'some; case why—his eye-sight was all froze right up tight to his head. Fact! I'll be dog-gone ef it wasn't!

"Wall, I'd bin out a trappin', and had made a purty good lick at it, and was comin' down to Bent's Fort, to make a lounge for the winter—leastways for what was left on't—when, jest as I crossed Cherry Creek, arter havin' left the Sothe Platte, I wish I may be smashed ef I didn't see 'bout a dozen cussed Rapahoes (Arrapahoes) coming toward me on hosses, as ef Old Nick hisself was arter 'em. I looked around me, and durned o' a thing could I see but snow and ice—and the snow was froze so hard that the hosses' and muleys' feet didn't make no dents into it. I was all alone, hoss-back, with three good muleys, all packed han'some; for Jim Davis—him as traveled with me—and Andy Forsker, another chap that made our party—had gone round another way, jest for fear o' them same painted heathen as was now a-comin' up. But ye see I'd bin bolder nor them, and now I was a-goin' to pay for't sartin; for I seed by thar looks they was bound to 'raise my ha'r'* ef I didn't do so'thing for my country quicker. I looked all around me, and thought I was a gone beaver fast enough. I had a purty good hoss under me, and I knowed he only *could* save me, and a mighty slim chance he'd hev on't at that. Howsomever, I reckoned it wasn't best to say die ef I could live, and I didn't like the notion o' being 'rubbed out'† by sich a dog-gone scrimptious lookin' set o' half humans as them thar Rapahoes. I cast around me, and seed that old Sweetlove (rifle), and her pups (pistols), and my butchers (knife and tomahawk) was all about;

* Take my scalp.

† Killed.

and so I jest swore I'd set my traps and make one on 'em come ef I went a wolfin' for it.

"I said thar was about a dozen—mayhap more—and they was ticklin' thar hosses' ribs mighty han'some, you'd better believe ; and a comin' for me with a parfect looseness ; every one on 'em carryin' a bow, and every bow bent with an arrer into it. I knowed my muleys was gone, sartin, and all my traps and furs ; but jest then I felt so all-fired mad, that I thought ef I could throw a couple I wouldn't care a kick. So instead o' trying to run away, I hollered 'Whoa' to the animals, and waited for the redskins to come up. (Jest a drap more of that, Rash, ef you please ; for this here hoss is as dry to-night as a dog-worried skunk).

"Wall, on they comes, thunderin' away like a new-invented arthquake, and I s'pected for sartin I was a gone beaver. Jest afore they got up so as they could let thar shafts riddle me, the infarnal cowards, seeing as how I didn't budge, had the oudaciousness to come to a halt, and stare at me as ef I was a kangaroo. I raised Sweetlove, and told her to tell 'em I'sabout and some in a b'ar fight. She answered right han'some, did Sweetlove ; and down the for'ard one drapped right purty, *he* did. Wall, this sot the rest on 'em in a rage ; and, afore I knowed it, they was all around me, yellin' like the Old Scratch. Half a dozen shafts come hiss'n' through my buckskins ; and two on 'em stuck right in my meat-bag, and made me feel all over in spots like a Guinea nigger. Instanter I pulled out Sweetlove's pups, and sot 'em to barkin', and two more o' the humans drapped down to see how the snow felt. Knowin' it wasn't no use foolin' mo time, I jerked the ropes, and told Skinflint to travel afore my ha'r was raised, leaving the muleys to do what they durned please.

"Seein' me a-goin', the oudacious Rapahoes thought they'd stop me ; but I rid right through 'em purty, and got another arrer in my back for it.

"Arter I'd got away, I looked round and seed two on 'em a-comin' like all possessed, with their lariats doubled for a throw. I knowed, ef they got near enough, I'd be snaked off like a dead possum, and my ha'r raised afore

I could say Jack Robinson. Mayhap I didn't ax Skinflint to do his purtiest; and mayhap he didn't, hey! Why he left a trail o' fire behind him, as he went over that ar frozen snow, that looked for all nater like a streak o' big lightnin'. But it didn't seem to be o' no use; for the infarnal scamps come thunderin' on, jest about so fur behind, and I seed thar hosses was all o' the right stuff. The sun was about a two hour up, and thar he stayed, *he* did; for it was so almighty cold, as I said afore, he couldn't git down to hide.

"Wall, on we run, and run, and run, till the hosses smoked and puffed like a Massassip steamer, and still we run. I made tracks, as nigh as could calkerlate, for the mountains, in the direction of Pike's Peak; and on we went, as ef old Brimstone was arter us. I calkerlated my chasers 'ud git tired and gin in; but they was the real grit, and didn't seem to mind it the least bit.

"At last they begun to gain on me; and I knowed, from the signs o' Skinflint, that he'd hev to go under, sure as guns, ef I didn't come to a rest purty soon. You'd better believe I felt queer jest then, and thought over all my sins, with the arrers sticking in me, front and back, like all git out. I tried to pray; but I'd never larnt no prayers when a pup, and now I was too old a dog to ketch new tricks; besides, it was so all-fired cold, that my thoughts stuck in my head like they was pinned thar with icykels. I'd been chased afore by the Comanches and Blackfoot, by the Pawnees and Kickapoos, by the Crows and Chickasaws, but I'd never had sich feelin's as now. The short on't is, boys, I was gittin' the squaw into me, and I knowed it; but I'll be dog-gone ef I could help it, to save my ha'r, that stood up so stiff and straight as to raise my hat and let the atmospheric in about a foot. I was gittin outrageous cold, too, and could feel my heart pumpin' up icykels by the sack, full, and I knowed death was about, sartin as daylight.

"'Wall,' sez I to myself, 'ole hoss, you've got to go under and lose your topknot, so what's the use a-kickin'?"

"'Howsomever,' I answered, 's'posin' I has, I reckon's best to die game, ain't it?' and with that I pulled old Sweetlove round and commenced fodderin' her as best I

could. She knowed what was wanted, did Sweetlove, and looked right sassy—I'll be dog-gone ef she didn't.

“ ‘ You're a few, ain't you ? ’ sez I, as I rammed home an all-fired charge of powder that made her grunt like forty.

“ Wall, I turned round, fatched her up to my face, and, drawing a bead* on to the nearest, pulled the trigger.

“ Now you needn't believe it without ye take a notion, but I'll be rumfuzzled (stir that fire, Ned, or this here meat won't git toasted till midnight), ef she didn't hold shoot about a minnet, and I all the time squintin' away too, afore the fire could melt the ice round the powder and let her off. That's a fact ! I'll be dog-gone ef it ain't !

“ Wall, she went off at last, *she* did, with a whoosss-k cheeesss-cup cho-bang ; and I hope I may be dogged for a possum, ef one o' my chasers didn't hev to pile himself on a level with his moccasins right han'some. Now I thought as how this 'ud start the wind out o' t'other, and put him on the back'ard track. But it didn't. He didn't seem to mind it no more'n's ef it was the commonest thing out.

“ Wall,' thinks I to myself, ' mayhap you'll ketch a few ef you keeps foolin' your time that-a-ways ; ' and so I sot to work and foddered Sweetlove agin.

“ By this time poor Skinflint, I seed, was gittin' top-heavy right smart ; and I knowed ef I done anything, it 'ud hev to be done afore the middle o' next month, or 'twouldn't be o' no use—not a durned bit. Wall, I took squint agin, plum-center, and blazed away ; but hang me up for b'ar's meat ef it made the least diff'rence with that skunk of a Rapaho. I was perfect dumfouzled ; complete used up ; for I'd never missed a target o' that size afore sence I was big enough to shoot pop-guns to flies. I felt sort o' chaw'r'd up. Never felt so all of a heap afore but once't, and that was when I axed Suke Harris to hev me, and she said ' No.'

“ Now you'd better calkerlate I hadn't no great deal o' time to think ; for thar he was, the cussed Injin, jest as plain as the nose on your face, and a-comin' full split

* Taking close sight.

right at me, with his rope quirked in his hand jest ready for a throw. Quicker as winkin' I foddered Sweetlove agin, and gin him another plum-center, which in course I s'pected would knock the hind-sights off o' him. Did it? Now you ken take my possibles, traps and muleys, ef it did. Did it? No! I reckon it didn't. Thar he sot, straight up and down, a thunderin' on, jest as ef the arth was made for his partikelar purpose. I begun to git skeered in arnest, and thought mayhap it was the devil deformed into a Injin; and I'd a notion to put in a silver bullet, only I didn't hap to hev none about me.

"On he come, the scamp; and, on I bolted—or tried to, rayther—for Skinflint had got used up now, and down he pitched, sending me right plum over his noddle on to my back, whar I lay sprawlin' like a bottle o' spilt whisky.

"It's all up now, and I'm a gone possum," sez I, as I seed the Injin come tearin' ahead; and I drewed the old butcher, and tried to feed one o' the pups, but my fingers was so numb I couldn't.

"Wall, up rides old Rapaho, lookin' as savage nor a meat-ax, his black eyes shinin' like two coals o' fire. Wall, now, what d'ye think he did? Did he shoot me? No! Did he rope (lasso) me? No! Did he try to? No, I'll be dog-gone ef he did!"

"What did he do?" inquired I, quickly.

"Ay, ay, what did he do?" echoed Huntly.

"Bloody murther! if ye knows what he did, Misther George, spaak it, jist, and relave yer mind now!" put in the Irishman.

The old trapper smiled.

"Rash," he said, "ef that thar bottle isn't empty, I'll jest take another pull."

"Tain't all gone yit," answered Rash Will; "s'pect 'twill be soon, though; but go it, old hoss, and gin us the rest o' that blasted Rapaho affair."

The old man drank, smacked his lips, smiled and remarked:

"How scrimptious deer meat smells."

"But the Arrapaho!" cried I; "what did he do?"

"Do?" answered Black George, with a singular ex-

pression that I could not define: "Do? Why, he rid up to my hoss and stopped, *he* did; and didn't do nothin' else, *he* didn't."

"How so?"

"Case he was done for."

"Dead?"

"As dog meat—augh!"

"Ah! you had killed him, then?" cried I.

"No I hadn't, though."

"What then?"

"He'd died hisself, *he* had."

"How, died?"

"Froze, young Bossons—froze as stiff nor a white oak."

"Froze?" echoed two or three voices, mine among the rest.

"Yes, blaze my old carcass and send me a wolfin' ef he hadn't! and I, like a blasted fool, had been runnin' away from a dead Injin. Mayhap I didn't sw'ar some, and say a few that ain't spoke in the pulpit. You'd jest better believe, strangers, I felt soft as a chowdered possum."

"But how had he followed you if he was dead?"

"He hadn't, not partikerly; but his hoss had; for in course he didn't know his rider was rubbed out; and so he'd kept on arter mine, till the divin' of old Skinflint fotched him up a-standin'."

"Of course you were rejoiced at your escape?"

"Why, sort o' so, and sort o' not; for I felt so all-fired mean, to think I'd bin runnin' away from and shootin' to a dead Injin, that for a long spell I couldn't git wind enough to say nothin'."

"At last I sez, sez I, 'This heyar's purty business now, ain't it? I reckons, old beaver, you've had little to do, to be foolin' your time and burnin' your powder in this way;' and then I outs with old butcher, and swore I'd raise his ha'r."

"Wall, I coaxed my way up to his old hoss, and got hold on hisself; but it wasn't a durned bit o' use; he was froze right tight to the saddle. I tried to cut into him, but I'll be dog-gone ef my knife 'ud enter more 'n 'twould

into a stone. Jest then I took a look round, and may I be rumboozled ef the sun hadn't got thawed a leetle, and, arter strainin' so hard, had gone down with a jump right behind a big ridge.

"'Wall, sez I, 'this here pilgrim had better be making tracks somewhar, or he'll spile, sure.'

"So wishin' old Rapaho a pleasant time on't, I tried Skinflint; but findin' it wasn't no go, I gathered up sich things from my possibles as I couldn't do without, pulled the arrers out o' me, and sot off for a ridge 'bout five mile away.

"When I got thar, it was so dark you couldn't tell a tree from a nigger; and the wind—phe-ew!—it blowed so one time that I had to hitch on to a rock to keep myself any whar. I tried to strike a fire; but my fingers was so cold I couldn't; and the snow had kivered up everything, so that thar wasn't nothin' to make it on.

"'It's a screecher,' I sez to myself, 'and afore daylight I'll be rubbed out, sartin.'

"At last I begun to feel purty queer, and so sleepy I couldn't hardly keep open my peepers. I knowed ef I laid down and slept I was a gone beaver; and so, stumblin' about, I got hold o' a tree, and begun to climb; and when I got up high enough I slid down agin; and you'd better believe this here operation felt good—ef it didn't I wouldn't tell ye so.

"The whole blessed night I worked in this here way, and it blowin', and snowin', and freezin' all the time like sixty. At last mornin' come; but it was a durned long time about it, and arter I'd gin in that daylight wasn't no whar.

"Wall, as soon's I could see, off I sot, and traveled, and traveled, I didn't know which way nor whar, till night had come agin, and I hadn't seen nothin' human—and besides, I'd eat up all my fodder. I tried to shoot somethin'; but I'll be dogged ef thar was any varmints to shoot o' no kind—they was all froze up tighter nor duration.

"That night went like t'other, in rubbin' a tree; and the next day I sot on agin, and traveled till night, without eatin' a bit o' food. I had a leetle bacca, and that I

chawr'd like all git out, until I'd chawr'd it all up, and begun to think I was chawr'd up myself. I'd got, though, whar I could find a few sticks, and I made a fire, and it'd a jest done ye good to seen the way I sot to it.

"The next mornin' I put on agin; but I'd got so powerful weak that I rolled round like I'd been spylin' a quart. Night come agin, and I'd got worse tangled up nor ever, and didn't know the pint o' compass from a buffler's tail.

" 'Wall, it's all up with this here coon,' I sez; 'and so what's the use o' tryin'? Mought as wall die now as when I've got more sins to count;' and so, givin' old Sweetlove a smack, and tellin' her to be a good gal, I keeled over as nateral as shootin'. I looked up'ard, and seed a bright star, that ud just thawed its way down; and thinkin' mayhap I'd be thar soon, I gin in, and shut my peepers, as I s'pected for the last time.

"How long I laid thar I never knowed, and never s'pect to; but when I seed daylight agin, I found this heyar hoss in a Injin lodge, somewhar about; and tickle me with a pitch pine-knot ef I ever knowed exactly whar—for I forgot to 'blaze'* the place, and couldn't never find it agin. At fust, in course, I thought I was in the other country folks tells about; and thinks I, I've been stuck 'mongst the Injins, jest to punish me for raisin' so much ha'r while on the arth. I begun to git skeered, I tell ye; but it wasn't long afore I seed a sight that made it seem like Heaven any how—leastways I felt perfectly willin' to be punished that way eternally, I did. (I say, Bosson, got any more bacca? This here travels like a May frost.")

"Well, what did you see?" I inquired, as I hastily supplied him with the desired article.

"See? S'posin' you guess now. You're what they calls a Yankee, and ort to guess anything."

"Oh, I could not guess it I am satisfied."

* To "blaze" a tree is to mark it with an ax, or in some way, so that it can be identified. "A blazed path" is one so marked through-out.

"I can now," said the Irishman.

"Well, Teddy, out with it."

"Why, he saan a bothel o' whisky, in coorse; what else should he sae to make him happy all of a sudden?"

A roar of laughter followed this reply, in which Black George good-humoredly joined.

"Wall, you is some at guessin', you is," replied the old trapper; "but you didn't quite hit it, hoss. I say, strangers, what's the purtiest sight you ever seed on the arth?"

"A beautiful female," I replied.

"Wall, that's jest what I seen. I seed afore me a critter, in the shape o' a gal, that was the most purty I ever drawed bead on."

"A beautiful girl?" I exclaimed.

"Wall, stranger, she wasn't nothin' else, *she* wasn't—I'll be dog-gone ef she was!"

"Describe her!"

"Jest describe a angel, and you've got her to a T—ef you haven't, why was beavers growed? that's all."

"Who was she?"

"Wall, now, hoss, you're gittin' into the picters, and headin' off this old coon right center. I never knowed who she was, onless she was a sperit—for I'll be dog-gone ef ever I seed any thing half as decent 'bout a Injin."

"Can you not describe her?"

"Describe thunder! Why, she was the tallest specimen of a human as ever spylt par-flesh to buffler, she was. She had long ha'r, black as a thunder-cloud; and eyes black too; and so large and bright that you could see to shave in 'em as easy as trappin'. And then sich a face!—wall, that was a face, now, or I wouldn't tell ye so. It kept puttin' me in mind o' summer weather and persimmons—it was so almighty warm and sweet-lookin'. And oh, sich a nose—sich lips—sich teeth—and, heavens *and* arth! sich a smile! (A drap more, Will, for this child's mouth's gittin' watery a-thinkin', and that meat looks like feedin' time.)"

"Why, now you have raised my curiosity to the high-

est point," I said, "and so I must have the rest of the story forthwith."

"Boys often git thar cur'osity raised out here-aways, and thar ha'r too sometimes," replied the old hunter, coolly taking his meat from the stick and commencing to eat.

"But you are going to finish your story, George?" queried Huntly, quickly.

"Why, I s'pect I'll hev to ; but I'll make it short ; for I never likes to talk much 'bout that thar gal ; I al'ays feel so much all overish—I can't tell nobody zactly how."

"I suppose you fell in love with her?" returned Huntly, jocosely.

The old trapper suddenly paused, with the meat half way to his mouth, and turned upon my friend with a frown and gleaming eyes.

"Look heyar, boy," said he, "you don't mean to insult this child, I reckon?"

"Far from it!" answered Huntly, quickly. "I only spoke in jest, and crave your pardon if I offended!"

"'T wont do to jest about everything, young chap—case thar's spots as won't bear rubbin'. Howsomever, I sees you didn't mean nothin', and so I'll not pack it. Talkin' of love ! Now I doesn't know much 'bout the article, though I've seed nigh sixty year, and never was spliced to no gal ; but I'll tell you what 'tis, Bosson, ef I'd been thirty year younger, ef I hadn't made tracks with that ar gal, and hitched, then call me a buzzard and let me spile."

"How old was she?" I asked.

"Jest old enough to be purty, *she* was."

"But how had she found you so opportunely?"

"That's whar I'm fooled ; for though I axed her, and she told me, I'll be dog-gone ef I wasn't thinkin' how purty she looked when she talked, and let the whole on't slip by me, like tryin' to throw a buffler with a greased rope. All I could ever ketch on't was that she, or some other Injin, or somebody else, come across me, and tuk me in, did up my scratches, and fotched me sensible. She said she was purty much of a beaver 'mongst the Injins, and could do 'bout as she tuk a no-

tion ; but that ef I wanted my ha'r, I'd better be leavin' right smart, or mayhap I'd be made meat of. Augh !

"Wall, arter it come dark, she packed some fodder for me, and acterly went herself along and seed me through the camp—for it wasn't a reg'lar village of Injins, no how.

" 'What tribe's this?' I axed, arter I'd got ready to quit.

" 'That you musn't know,' sez she. 'Ax no questions, but set your face that-a-ways, and keep your nose afore ye till daylight, and don't come heyar agin, or you're a dead coon.'

" 'But ef you won't tell this child the Injins' name, tell me who you is?'

" 'I'm called Leni-Leoti, or Perrarie Flower,' sez she; and then, afore I could say, 'Oh, you is, hey?' she turned and put back like durnation.

"I'd a great notion to foller her, and I cussed myself arterwards case I didn't ; but I s'spect I was feelin' purty green then, and so I did jest what she told me to—ef I didn't, I wish I may be dogged ! When it come mornin', I looked all round, and concluded I was on t'other side of the 'Divide.' So I tuk a new track ; and, arter many days' travel, I fotched up in Brown's Hole, whar I found lots o' trappers and spent the winter—augh ! Now don't ax no more—for you've got all this hoss is agoin' to tell ; for the whisky's out, the bacca's low, this coon's ramptious, and the meat's a-spylin'."

Here, sure enough, the old trapper came to a pause ; and although I felt curious to know more about the singular being he had described, Prairie Flower, I saw it would be useless to question him further.

The conversation now turned upon trivial affairs, in which neither Huntly nor myself took much interest. We felt wearied and hungry ; and so, after regaling ourselves on toasted deer meat, without bread, and only a little salt, and having seen our animals driven in and picketed—that is, fastened to a stake in the ground, by a long lariat or rope of skin, so that they could feed in a circle—we threw ourselves upon the earth around the fire, and, with no covering but our garments, and the

broad canopy of heaven, brilliantly studded with thousands on thousands of stars, slept as sweetly and soundly as ever we did in a thick-peopled settlement.

CHAPTER VII.

A LUDICROUS MISTAKE.



T the first tinge of day-break, on the following morning, I sprung to my feet ; and, rousing Huntly, we stole quietly from the circle of sleeping trappers, and took our way to the eminence from which I had viewed the farewell of day the evening previous.

It was a splendid morning ; and the air, clear, soft and balmy, was not stirred by a single zephyr.

As we ascended the knoll and looked toward the east, we could barely perceive a faint blush, indicating the rosy dawn of day ; while a soft, gray light spread sweetly over the scene ; and the stars, growing less and less bright, gradually began to disappear from our view. Presently the blush of morn took a deeper hue, and, gently expanding on either hand, blended beautifully with the deepening blue. Then golden flashes shot upward, growing brighter and brighter, till it seemed as if the world were on fire ; while night, slowly receding, gradually revealed the lovely prairie to our enchanted gaze. Brighter, more golden, more beautiful grew the east, and brighter the light around us, until the stars had all become hidden, and objects far and near could be distinctly traced, standing out in soft relief from the green earth and the blue and golden sky.

“Magnificent !” I exclaimed, turning toward my friend, who was standing with his face to the east, his gaze fixed on high, apparently lost in contemplation.

He did not reply ; and, repeating my exclamation, I lightly touched him on the arm.

He started suddenly, and turned toward me, with an expression so absent, so vacant, that I felt a slight alarm, and instantly inquired:

"Huntly, are you ill?"

"Ill, Frank? No! no! not ill, by any means," he replied. "Why do you ask?"

"You appeared so strangely."

"Indeed! Well, where think you were my thoughts?"

"How should I know?"

"True enough, and I will tell you. I was thinking of that fair being we rescued from the flames."

"And why of her now?"

"Not only now, Frank, but she fills my thoughts more than you are aware. Often do I see her in my dreams; and the mere resemblance of yonder sky to fire, vividly recalled to mind that never-to-be-forgotten night when I first beheld her."

"Charley, you are in love."

"It may be," he answered, with a sigh; "but, alas! if so, I love one whom I shall never behold again;" and he dropped his head upon his breast in a musing mood.

"Nay, nay, old friend," I said, gayly; "it will not do for you to be getting sentimentally love-sick away out here upon the prairies. Who knows but some day she you are thinking of, may, in spite of your now doleful looks, become your own!"

"Frank," said Huntly, in quick reply, with a look of reproach, "if you knew my feelings, you would not wound them, I am sure, by untimely jests."

"Good heavens, Charley!" I exclaimed, in surprise, at once grasping his hand with a hearty pressure; "I wound your feelings? Why, such a thought never entered my head. I spoke jestingly, it is true; but I was not aware that the affair had become so serious. I was thinking at the time that one ailing youth in our camp was sufficient."

"To whom do you allude?"

"Myself."

"How so? I was not aware that you were ailing, as you call it."

"Why, do you not know that I am in love, like yourself?"

"Heavens! not with her, Frank? not with her?" cried my friend, grasping my arm nervously, and peering into my face with a searching glance.

"Ay, Charles, and I thought you knew it. I acted wrongly, I know, and have deeply repented since."

"But then, you—you—love her still, Frank?"

"Devotedly, as God is my judge!"

Huntly released my arm with a groan and turned away his head.

"What is the meaning of this, Charles?" I inquired, in a tone of alarm.

"Why did you not tell me before?" he said, with a long, deep sigh.

"First, because it is a delicate subject, and I did not like to mention it. Secondly, because you have never before alluded to it yourself."

"True; but I did not dream it was so. Ah! why, then, did you not let me perish in the flames?"

"Perish, Charles?—how strangely you talk! Why should I have let you perish?"

"To end my misery."

"Misery? You alarm me, Charles—you are not well—you have bad news—or something has happened which you have kept from me!"

"You love her, you say; is not that enough? But go on! I will yield all to you. I will not stand in your way. No! sooner would I die than mar your happiness. But I regret I did not know of it before."

"Charles," I exclaimed, in real alarm, "what mean you by these strange words? *You* stand in my way? I do not understand you; you have some hidden meaning!"

"Have you, then, not divined that I love her?"

"Ay."

"And can two love the same angelic being and both be happy?"

"Why not? I would not rob you of your love. True, I love her deeply, devotedly, I swear to you; and I know you love her also; but then our love is different. You

love her as a brother—but I as something more than a brother !”

“I see you are mistaken, Frank ; and to show you how much I sacrifice to your happiness, I will say, once for all, I love her as deeply, as devotedly, as passionately as yourself ; but not as a brother, my friend—oh, no—not as a brother !”

“Indeed, Charles !” I cried, with a terrible suspicion of something I dared not express : “Indeed, Charles !” and I grasped his arm, and sought his eye with mine : “Indeed, Huntly ! No ! no ! gracious heavens ! you cannot mean what you have said ! Take it back, I beg of you ! and avow you love her as a brother, and nothing more—for more would be criminal !”

“I do not see the criminality you speak of,” he answered, coldly. “Is it not enough that I have offered to sacrifice my own happiness, without being charged with crime ?”

“But, Charles, my friend, consider—you have no *right* to an attachment warmer than a brother’s !”

“*Right ?*” echoed Huntly, turning pale with excitement : “*Right*, say you ? Well, when it comes to that, I know not why my *right* to love her is not as good as yours !”

“Shall I tell you ?”

“Ay, do ! Quote me the law that makes it criminal for me to love and not yourself !” answered Charles, bitterly.

“The law of consanguinity !”

“Heavens ! what do you mean ?”

“Does not the same blood flow in the veins of both of you ?”

“Good Lord ! you chill my blood with horror ! you do not mean this ?” and my friend turned deadly pale, reeled like one intoxicated, and grasped my arm for support. “I was not aware of this, Frank !”

I now became more alarmed than ever. Something had assuredly turned the brain of my friend ; and he was now—(how I shuddered as I thought)—he was now a maniac !

"Why, Charley," I said, in a tone as soothing as I could command, "surely you know her to be your sister!"

"*Sister?*" he fairly shrieked.

"Ay, sister, Charley! Is not Lilian Huntly your sister?"

"Lilian?" he cried, with a start, and a rapid change of countenance that terrified me. "Lilian? Then *you* were speaking of my sister Lilian?"

"Assuredly! who else?"

Huntly looked at me for a moment steadily, and then burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, that made my blood run cold.

"Great Heaven!" I cried; "his senses are indeed lost!" and I was on the point of hurrying to camp, to give the alarm and get assistance, when, seizing me by the arm with one hand, and giving me a hearty slap on the shoulder with the other, he exclaimed:

"Frank, if ever there were two fools, then you and I are a pair!"

"Poor fellow!" I sighed, and my eyes filled with tears. "What a shock it will be to his family!"

"Why, Frank," he cried again, accompanying his words with another slap, "you are dreaming, man!—your senses are wool gathering!"

"Exactly!" I said; "he, of course, thinks *me* insane, poor fellow!"

"Nonsense, Frank! It's all a mistake, my dear fellow! and a laughable one truly, as you must know. *You* were speaking of my sister Lilian; while *I*, all the time, was alluding to the fair Unknown."

"What!" cried I, now comprehending it all at once; "then it is no insanity with you? and we have both made fools of ourselves indeed!"

"Exactly; so give me your hand on it, my old chum!"

Instantly my hand was locked in that of my friend; and then such a shout of merriment as we both set up, at the ridiculousness of the whole affair, I venture to say was never heard in that part of the country before nor since.

"So, then," resumed I, "the secret is out, and we have both acknowledged to being deeply in love! Really, dear Charley, I feel under great obligations to you for that meditated *sacrifice*—more especially, as the lady in question is thousands of miles away, is entirely unknown to either of us, and will probably never be seen again by either Charles Huntly or Francis Leighton."

"Tut, tut, tut, Frank! 'No more of that, an' thou lovest me,'" returned my friend, good humoredly. "I admit that I have acted the simpleton; but, at the same time (and he gave me a comical look), I feel proud to say I have had most excellent company—Eh! my dear fellow?"

"I acknowledge the corn."

"But, touching my sister, Frank?"

"Well, what of her?" I said quickly, while I felt the blood rush to my face in a warm current.

"Did you not act hastily—too hastily—in that matter, my friend?"

"I fear I did, and I have bitterly repented of it since. But I loved her so, Charley; and you know my passionate nature could not brook a rival!"

"A rival, Frank? I never knew you had a rival."

"What! not know the elegant Mr. Wharton?"

"Pah! you did not take him for a rival, I hope!"

"Indeed I did! Does he not visit your house frequently?"

"Yes, and so do fifty others; but I assure you dear Lilian will not marry them all."

"But—but—I thought Wharton—a—a——"

"A fashionable gallant? So he is."

"No—a—a—special suitor to your sister's hand," I stammered, concluding the sentence my friend had interrupted.

"Pshaw, Frank! Why, Lilian would not look at him—other than to treat him respectfully, as she would any other visitor—much less *marry* him."

"Then you think she does not love him?"

"Love him?" echoed Huntly, with a smile of contempt, and an expressive shrug of his shoulders. "No! Lilian Huntly loves but one."

"And who is he?"

"One certain hot-headed youth, ycleped Francis Leighton."

"Are you sure of this, Charles?" and I caught the hand of my friend and fastened my eye steadily upon his.

"I will stake my life on it! and had you been possessed of your usual good sense that night you must have seen it!"

I released the hand I had clasped in mine, and staggered back as if struck a violent blow. My brain grew dizzy, my hands trembled, and it was with difficulty I could keep myself upon my feet. Instantly the arm of my friend supported me, and he said, hurriedly:

"Good heavens! what have I done? Frank—Frank—take this not so hard!—it will all be right in the end. Lilian and you were made for each other, I see; and this separation will only serve to knit more closely the tie of affection between you when again you meet."

I replied not; I could not; but I gave vent to a groan that seemed to issue from my very soul.

"Is it there ye is, your honors?" said the voice of Teddy at this moment. "Faith, now, I've been lookin' for yees wid my two eyes and ears this long while, to ax ye, would yees have your breakfast cooked, or be afther takin' it raw?"

"Cooked, you fool!" cried Huntly, angrily.

"Thin all I have to say is, it's waitin', your honors, and done beauthiffully, by the chief cook and buthler, Teddy O'Lagherty, barring that he's no cook at all, at all, worth mintion, and divil a bit o' a buthler is in him now. And what's more, I'm to till ye that the Misther Trapphers is jist gitting ready to lave the whereabouts, and they sez, be yees going wid 'em they'll be axing yees to travel!"

"Sure enough," said Huntly, looking down toward the camp, "they are preparing to leave in earnest. So come, Frank!" and taking my arm in his we descended the hill together in silence

CHAPTER VIII.

THE JOURNEY AND INDIAN SIGN.



Y the time we had joined the trappers the sun had already risen and was streaming his golden light over the broad prairie with a beautiful effect.

Hastily partaking of our breakfast, and watering our animals at a small creek, which ran bubbling around the base of the little knoll so often mentioned, we prepared to raise our camp, as packing up to leave is termed by the mountaineers. Placing our saddles, possibles and other things on our horses and mules, we mounted and took a northern course over the prairie.

As we passed along we saw a few deer away in the distance, and occasionally caught sight of a buffalo; while animals of various kinds and sizes appeared here and there, sporting in the glorious sunbeams and seeking their daily fare, both single and in numbers. However, as we had plenty of meat laid in for the present, we did not trouble them, but kept quietly along upon our course—Black George taking the lead as guide, and the rest of us following him in Indian file.

A little past noon we came to a small creek which flows into the Blue Earth River, or Big Blue, as I heard it called by the mountain men; and here we paused again to water our animals, and allow them a few minutes to crop the luxuriant grass beneath their feet.

“Thar’s time enough, boys, I’m thinkin’,” said Black George; “so what’s the use o’ hurryin’? S’pect we wouldn’t live no longer for’t; and jest to tell the fact, I’m in no partikular drive to quit this warm sunshine for the clouds and snow and ice o’ the mountains. Eh! Ned? Augh!”

“Don’t know’s the mountains ’ll be any better for our waitin’,” grumbled Ned; “and as long’s we’ve got to go, what’s the use o’ our throwin’ away time here!”

"Augh!" grunted the old trapper; "you're al'ays in a haste, boy; and some day you'll git rubbed out in a haste, or I'm no beaver. Come, what say *you*, Tom? You haint opened your face sence you bolted that meat—leastways to my knowin'."

"I don't care a chawr which—stay or go—suit yourselves," answered Daring Tom, sententiously.

"Wall, boys," rejoined the old mountaineer, "we'll hold our wind about a quarter and then travel."

Saying this he dismounted from his mule, drew his pipe from a little holder suspended round his neck, and, squatting upon the ground, deliberately filled and ignited it, by means of punk, flint and steel, and commenced puffing away, as indifferent to everything or person around him as if he had been paid expressly to pass his life in this manner.

Fiery Ned, however, was not pleased; and, ripping out a few oaths, on what he termed the "blamed laziness of the thing," he jerked up his mules and set forward—followed by Rash Will only—Daring Tom and ourselves remaining with Black George.

The last-mentioned puffed away quietly until the foremost party had disappeared; when, taking his pipe from his mouth, blowing out a large volume of smoke, and watching it as it curled round and round on its ascent, he turned to me with a comical look, and, shrugging his shoulders and winking his eye, observed:

"They'll not live no longer for't, hoss—I'll be dog-gone ef they will!"

With this he drew his legs a little more under him, and resumed his pipe with the stoical gravity of a Dutchman.

The spot where we were now halted was one of rare beauty. It was a little valley, nearly surrounded by hills in the shape of a horse-shoe, along the base of which, like a silver wire, wound the little murmuring rivulet, its waters sparkling in the sunshine, becoming glassy in the shade, and mirroring the steeps above it, as it gayly took its way to unite with the larger waters of the Blue. Above us, on three sides, rose the horse-shoe ridge, partially bare with frowning rocks, and partially covered with a

dwarfish growth of various kinds of wood. The valley, or bottom, was a rich alluvion, carpeted with fresh, sweet grass—which our animals cropped eagerly—and with various kinds of wild flowers; while hundreds of gay-plumed birds were hovering over our heads, or skimming along the surface, and thus checkering and enlivening the scene with their presence, and filling the air and our ears with the melody of their voices. The point of the valley not belted with the hills, looked out upon a prairie, which stretched away to the west and south, its half-grown grass waving in the breeze and resembling the light ripples of some beautiful lake.

“What a lovely scene!” said Huntly, turning to me, as, dismounted, we both stood gazing upon it.

“A little Paradise that I have never seen surpassed!” was my answer.

“Yes, but everything beautiful hereabouts gits spylt to them as knows it a few,” chimed in the old hunter, blowing the smoke deliberately from his mouth. “Now I’ve no doubt this place looks purty to you; but I’ve seen blood run hereaways—augh!”

“Indeed!” I exclaimed, advancing to the old trapper, as did each of the others, with the exception of Tom, who, having squatted himself at some little distance and lit his pipe, seemed wholly absorbed with thoughts of his own. “Then there has been fighting here in days gone by?” I pursued.

“Wall, thar has, hoss!” was the response. “Ye see that ar creek, don’t ye?” pointing to it with the stem of his pipe.

“Ay.”

“Wall, it looks purty enough to them as don’t know—but this coon’s seen them waters red afore now.”

“Tell us the tale!” said Huntly.

“Why, it’s long, Bosson, and we haint got time to throw away—so I’ll hev to let it slide, I’m thinkin’. Howsomever, I’ll gin ye the gist on’t, and I s’pose that’ll do as wall. That creek you see yonder’s bin called Cotton’s Creek ever sence that time; and the reason on’t is, case a powerful good chap, called Jim Cotton, or Snake Eye, got rubbed out thar by the cussed Pawnees. Me and

him, and Jake Strader, and Sigh Davis, had been down to St. Louey, and sold our beavers to the Nor-Westers *—(and them was the days when they fotched somethin'—five dollar a plew,† old or young uns, instead o' a dollar a pound—augh!)—and coming out to Independence with the rocks in our pockets, we got on a rigelar spree, and spent a few—but not all—and a infernal Greaser‡ somehow gittin' wind on't, and findin' out jest which way we's a-goin', put out ahead, and got some five or six Pawnees to jine him, and come down here to waylay us.

“Wall, in course we wasn't thinkin' o' nothin' dangerous, case our bottles warn't all emptied and we felt happy enough. Jest down here we stopped to water and rest, like we're doin' now, when all at once that ar bush you see yonder, near the bank, let out seven bullets right amongst us. Jim Cotton was throwed cold, and never kicked arter, poor feller! Jake Strader got his arm broke, Sigh Davis a ball through his shoulder, and me one right into my calf. Then thinkin' they'd throwed the majority, the oudacious skunks come tearin' and yellin' like sin, old Greaser on the lead. A part broke for us, and the rest for our animals, so as ef they didn't count a coup they could put us afoot.

“‘Heyars ha'r and a chance for dry powder—gin 'em blazes!' sez I; and I ups with old Sweetlove and throwed old Greaser cold, right in his tracks—so cold he never knowed what made meat of him, Greaser didn't.

“Wall, jest as mine went, I heerd two more pops, and blow me for a liar ef two more of the durned rascals didn't drap purty! How they'd done it—partikerly Jake Strader with his broken arm—got me all of a heap; but done it they had, sartin as winkin'; and thar the varmints lay, a-kickin' like durnation. Now thar was only four left; and grabbin' Jim Cotton's rifle, afore they knowed what I was about, I laid another han'some. Now we was even, and I hollered to the skunks to come on and show fa'r fight, and I'd eyther lick the three or gin 'em my sculp. But they hadn't no notion o' tryin'

* Hudson Bay Company is sometimes so called by the trappers.

† A whole skin.

‡ Spaniard or Mexican.

on't, the cowards ! but turned and split as ef the arth was a-goin' to swaller 'em.

" 'Hurraw for us beavers !' I sez ; 'and let us go a ha'r-raisin' ;' and with that I takes my butcher and walks into the varmints ; and them as wasn't dead I carved ; and arter I'd done, me and Sigh—for Jake couldn't work wall—we hove the meat into the water, and called it Cotton's Creek. Then we dug a hole, nigh 'bout whar you're standing, put in poor Jim, kivered him over, and, jest as we was, all wowed, we mounted our critters and put out."

"And do ye think there is, maybe, iny of the likes of thim rid divils about here now, sure, Misther Trapper George?" inquired Teddy, with an uneasy look.

"Shouldn't wonder, hoss ; for we're a-goin' right toward 'em."

"Faith, thin," said Teddy, turning slightly pale, "maybe it's the wrong road ye're going now?"

"Oh, ye needn't fear I'll miss the track !" answered the old hunter, who put a literal construction on the Irishman's words. "I knows the ground as wall as you knows your own daddy."

"Agh ! and well ye may, Misther George, and have little to brag on the whiles, jist !" rejoined the other quickly. "But what I maan is, it's maybe, if we take anither way, we'll not rin among the divils, and git made maat on, as ye calls it, now?"

"Why, Teddy," said I, "you are not becoming alarmed at this stage of the journey, I hope?"

"Och, no ! its not alar-r-med mesilf is gittin' at all, at all, barring a little fright maybe I has for your honor's safety."

"Oh, never mind me, Teddy," I replied. "I assure you I am doing very well, and prepared myself to run all hazards before I came here."

"Well," observed Huntly, "I think we had better set forward again and select our camp early."

"That's a fact !" cried Black George, springing to his feet, with the agility of a youth of twenty: "You is right, boy—right ! Come, Tom, we's a-goin' to put ;" and he turned toward his saddle mule. "*Hey ! what ?*"

he exclaimed suddenly, with a stress upon the words that instantly brought us all around him, eager to learn the cause.

But nothing could we discover, save that the old mule alluded to was snuffing the air, with her ears bent forward and pointing steadily in one direction. Two or three words, however, from the old trapper, sufficed to enlighten and alarm us at the same time.

"Injins, boys—rifles ready—Suke's no liar!" Then turning to Tom, who had also started to his feet on hearing the first exclamation of Black George, he added: "Split for kiver, Tom, an' hunt for sign!"

Scarcely was the sentence out of the old man's mouth, ere Tom was out of sight; for, understanding all at a glance, he turned at the first word, and, leaping across the stream, suddenly disappeared in a thicket on the other side.

I felt rather strangely, I must own, for it was the first time that danger had become apparent to me; and this being concealed, I knew not what to expect, and of course magnified it considerably. Besides, the story I had just heard, together with the quick and decisive movements of the trappers, led me to anticipate a sudden onset from a large body of Indians.

Determined to sell my life dearly, I grasped my rifle with one hand, and loosened my pistols and knife with the other.

I cast a quick glance at Huntly, and saw that he was also prepared for the worst. His features had paled a little, his brow was slightly wrinkled, and his lips compressed, showing a stern resolve.

But the Irishman, in spite of my fears, amused me. Instead of bringing up his rifle ready for an aim, Teddy had gripped it midway, and was whirling it over his head as he would a shillalah, the while raising one foot and then the other in great excitement, as if treading on live coals, his face flushed, his eyes fixed in one direction, his nostrils expanded, and his breast heaving with hard breathing.

"Quick!" exclaimed Black George; "fotch 'round the animals and make a breastwork to kiver."

Instantly Huntly and I sprung to our horses, and the old trapper to his mules; while the Irishman, heeding nothing that was said, still continued his laborious gyrations.

In less than a minute the animals were arranged in our front, and we were re-priming our fire-weapons, already prepared to repel the attack manfully, should one be made.

A minute of silence succeeded, when Black George called out to Teddy:

"D'ye want to be made meat on, you thunderin' fool! that you stand thar like a monkey target?"

But the Hibernian either did not hear, or, hearing, did not heed.

"Teddy!" I shouted.

"Here, your honor!" answered Teddy, running up and crawling under my horse—he having been standing outside of our animal breast-work.

"What were you doing out there, Teddy?"

"Troth, I was gitting my hand in jist!"

"Yes, and you mought hev got a bullet into your meat-bag!" rejoined the old trapper, dryly.

"Ah!" said Teddy, dolefully; "if ye'll belave me now, it's that same doings that worries meself the most in this kind of fighting. Barring the shooting and the danger attinding it, it's me mother's son as wouldn't mind fighting at all, at all."

"There are a great many such heroes in the world," I rejoined, with a smile; "and most men are brave when there is no danger. But I'll exonerate you from being a coward, Teddy, for you once nobly saved my life; but, at the same time, I think I shall have to give you a few lessons when this affair is over, so that you will be able to act becomingly under like circumstances and know the proper use of your rifle."

"Hist!" said Black George at this moment.

All became a dead silence. Presently the faint cawing of a distant crow was heard in the woods nearest to us.

"Injin sign, but no sudden dash," observed the old trapper again.

"Indeed!" I exclaimed, in surprise; "and pray how came you by your information?"

"Jest as easy as you kin look at pot-hooks and tell what they sez," answered the mountaineer. "You know how to read a heap in books; I know how to read the signs o' nater; and both is good in thar places. You heerd that crow, I'm thinkin'?"

"I did."

"Wall, that was Darin' Tom, speakin' to me and tellin' me what I told you."

Ere I had time to express my surprise, the person in question made his appearance, leaping nimbly across the little creek and gliding up to us as silently as an Indian.

"What's the sign?" asked Black George.

"Pawnees," was the answer.

"How'd they number? and which way?"

"Twenty odd, and toward the sothe."

"Arter ha'r?"

"I reckon."

"Be apt to trouble us?"

"Think they passed with their eyes shut."

"Playin' possum mayhap. How long gone?"

"Less nor a quarter."

"Then Suke must have smelt 'em. She's a knowin' one, is Suke, and don't fool her time. S'pect we'd better put out and look for camp?"

"I reckon."

"Augh!"

Although this kind of dialogue was new to me, I nevertheless was able to understand that a body of Pawnees had passed us, and were either not aware of our proximity, or did not care to make an attack upon us in broad daylight.

As the mountaineers concluded, they instantly mounted their mules and set foward; and, springing upon our horses, we kept them company.

As we left the little cove—if I may so term it—by way of the prairie, we were surprised to meet Fiery Ned and Rash Will on their return to join us.

"Wall?" said Black George interrogatively.

"Injins !" returned Rash Will.

"Ahead or ahind?"

"Moccasins to the sothe."

"We've seed 'em—augh!"

No more was said; but, wheeling their animals, the two mountaineers silently joined the others and we all moved forward together.

The country over which we were now passing was exceedingly beautiful and picturesque. Alternately well-timbered bottoms—steep, craggy, barren bluffs—open, rolling prairies—met our view; while sparkling little streams, winding around in every direction, appeared like silver threads fastening the whole together.

On our way hither we had passed through Independence, one of the most important points in Missouri for obtaining an outfit, and, taking much the same route as that since followed by Oregon emigrants, had crossed the Caw or Kansas River a day or two previous to our camp on the prairie, of which I have given a description.

Although this, as I then said, was our first camp on the prairie, I wish the reader to distinctly understand it was not our first encampment beyond the boundaries of civilization. But as I did not care to trouble him with a tedious journey, which produced no important incident, I jumped over our progress to the time when I felt our adventures had really begun. I say this in explanation, lest, having traveled the route himself, he might be puzzled to understand how, in so short a time from the raising of our camp, we could have become so far advanced.

It was now late in June, and the sun poured down his heat with great intensity, so that our animals perspired freely, and seemed far more inclined to linger in the shade, when we passed a timbered spot, than to hurry forward in the open sunshine. Nevertheless we managed, before the sun sunk to rest, to put a good thirty miles between us and our camp of the previous evening.

Reaching at last a smooth, pleasant spot, belted with hills, not unlike the one of our noonday halt, and through which likewise murmured and sparkled a little rivulet,

we paused and decided to camp at once. In a few minutes our animals were hobbled, and regaling themselves with great gusto upon the sweet, green grass which here grew exuberantly.

"Somebody'll hev to stand watch to-night," observed Black George, as we seated ourselves around the fire, which had been kindled for the purpose of toasting our meat and keeping off the wild beasts. "Who's a-goin' to claim the chance?"

No one answered; but the other trappers all looked towards Huntly and myself, which I was not slow to understand.

"Do you think there is any danger to-night?" I inquired.

"Thar's never a time in this part of the world when thar isn't, stranger!" was the answer.

"But do you apprehend an attack from the savages to-night?"

"Can't tell for sartin what may hap; but you know what happ'd to-day, and thar's sign about as cl'ar as daylight."

"Well, if you think I will answer the purpose, I am ready to volunteer my services."

The old trapper mused a moment, shook his head, and replied:

"I'm afeard not. I'll keep guard myself; for you're young and purty green, and mightn't know a Injin from a tree; and it's like thar'll be powder burnt afore morning."

Although these words portended danger, yet so fatigued was I, from my day's travel, that in less than two hours from the time they were spoken, in common with the rest (Black George alone excepted), I was sound asleep.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NIGHT ATTACK.



WAS once more in my native land. Time had flown rapidly, years had rolled onward, thousands on thousands of miles had been gone over, and now I again stood in the city of my nativity.

Strange and powerful emotions stirred me. I was wending my way through the old and well-remembered streets to the home of one who had been daily and nightly in my thoughts during my long absence. I already pictured myself entering her abode, and the start and thrill of joyful surprise on her beholding me again.

At length I reached the well-known mansion. There it stood, just as I had left it. There were the same steps I had ascended, and the bell I had rung, on the night when I had so abruptly and cruelly torn myself from her sweet presence. I felt a nervous tremor run through my whole system. I could scarcely stand. My heart seemed to shrink into nothing, my blood began to curdle in my veins, and my quaking limbs refused to do my bidding. There I stood, shaking like an aspen leaf, afraid to go forward, unwilling to retreat.

At length, by a great effort, I grew more calm. With a fresh determination not to be conquered by myself, I rushed up the steps and rang the bell.

A servant appeared.

But he was not the one I expected to behold; not the one who had answered my former summons; his face was new to me. This was a change, it is true, and produced some very unpleasant feelings; but this was a common one, and nothing to alarm me.

"Is Miss Huntly at home?" I inquired.

"Miss Huntly don't live here, sir."

"What!" cried I, gasping for breath; "not live here?"

"No, sir! this is Mr. Wharton's house."

"Wharton! Yes—well—he—he—is—married?"

"Yes, sir—he's married."

"Whom did he marry?"

"Don't know, sir."

"Was it—a—Lilian Huntly?"

"No, indeed—I guess it wasn't! He wouldn't look at her, I know!"

"Not look at her, villain! why not?" cried I; and, excited beyond reason, I seized my informant by the collar. "Why would he not look at her, wretch?" I repeated, hoarsely. "Tell me quickly! or I will dash your brains out at my feet!"

"Ca-cause she's poor!" was the trembling reply.

"Poor?" I almost shouted.

"Ye-yes, sir!"

"And where is she to be found?"

"Just round that alley yonder—first door to the left."

I followed with my eyes the direction indicated by the finger of my informant, and the next moment found the door slammed in my face.

But for this I cared not. Lilian was in trouble.

With one bound I cleared the steps, and, darting down the street, turned the corner of the alley and stood before a miserable, wooden house.

"Gracious heavens!" I cried, mentally; "the home of Lilian—dear Lilian!" and the next moment, without pausing to knock, I burst open the door, and entered a miserable apartment, scantily furnished.

The first object that fixed my attention was sweet Lilian herself: but, oh! how altered! how pale! how wo-begone her look! Her dress and appearance bespoke poverty and suffering and chilled my blood.

"Lilian!" I cried, rushing toward her with outstretched arms.

She rose—stared at me—a frightful expression swept over her pale, grief-worn, but still lovely features—she struggled forward—gasped—and, uttering my name, with a terrible shriek, sunk senseless into my arms.

At this moment the door was burst rudely open; and

Wharton, with eyes gleaming fire, pistol in hand, rushed into the apartment.

Ere I had time for thought, the pistol flashed, the report rang in my ears, and the ball buried itself in the head of my beloved Lilian.

With a shriek of horror I dropped her lifeless body, and—*awoke*.

I looked up and saw Huntly bending over me, heard a confused noise, the discharge of fire-arms, and, rising above all the din, the yells of savages.

"Awake, Frank!—up, for God's sake!—we are attacked!" cried Huntly.

Instantly I sprung to my feet, completely bewildered.

"Tree! tree! or you're a dead beaver!" shouted a voice behind me.

I turned around, but was still too much confused to understand what was meant.

The next moment Huntly seized me by the arm, hurriedly dragged me to a neighboring tree, and thrust me behind it on the side farthest from the fire.

I had cause to be thankful for this; for, as I moved from the spot where I had stood, a ball whizzed past me, which, had it been sped a second sooner, would doubtless have proved fatal.

I now learned, from a few hurried words spoken by my friend, that the Indians—supposed to be Pawnees, and, in fact, the same party which had alarmed us at Cotton's Creek—had made a sudden dash at our animals, which were picketed within pistol-shot of the fire, and, with loud yells, had discharged their pieces and arrows into our camp, fortunately without doing us any injury. In a moment every one had sprung to his feet, with the exception of myself, who, lost in the mazes of a troublesome dream, had actually converted the screeches of the savages into cries from Lilian, and the report of fire-arms into the fatal shot from the pistol of one I had looked upon as a rival. Each of the trappers had hurriedly sought his tree, while the Irishman, though a good deal bewildered, had had the presence of mind and good sense to imitate their example. Huntly of course could not

leave me to perish, and had paused to rouse me in the manner shown.

By this time all had become silent as the grave. Our camp-fire was still burning brightly, and by its light we could trace a large circle round it; but not an object, save our animals—some of which, particularly the mules, snuffed and snorted, and appeared very restless—was seen to stir. One would suppose, to have gazed around him on that warm, still night, that not a creature more dangerous than the fire-fly and mosquito was at hand to disturb the now seemingly deep and solemn solitude of the place.

In this way some two or three minutes passed, during which you could have heard the fall of a leaf, when suddenly the stillness was broken by the report of a rifle within twenty feet of me, and was succeeded by a yell of agony some thirty paces distant in another direction, while an Indian, whom I had not before observed, staggered forward and fell within the circle lighted by the fire.

Now it was, as if the whole wilderness were full of demons, that the most terrific yells resounded on all sides; and some fifteen or twenty savages, naked all but the breech-clout, hideously painted, were seen dodging among the scattering trees, making towards us, and discharging their muskets and bows at random. A bullet striking the stock of my rifle just above where my hand grasped it, splintering it, and sending some of the pieces into my face, angered me not a little, and I vowed revenge upon the first savage I could lay eyes on.

"Give the durned skunks thunder!" shouted a voice; and ere the words were fairly uttered, some three or four rifles belched forth their deadly contents, and three more savages rolled howling in the dust.

At this moment I discovered a powerful Indian making toward me, scarcely ten feet distant, his basilisk eyes fairly shining like two coals of fire; and raising my rifle quick as lightning to my face, without even pausing to sight it, I lodged the contents in his body. He staggered back, partly turned to fly, reeled, and then with a howl of rage fell to the earth a corpse.

The Indians of the Far West, of the present day, are not the Indians of former times, whose wigwams once rose where now stand our cities and hamlets, and whose daring in war, when led by a Philip, a Pontiac, or a Tecumseh, could only be excelled by their cunning and ferocity. No ! far from it. The present tribes have degenerated wonderfully. They are, take them as a whole, a dirty, cowardly, despicable set, without one noble trait, and not worth the powder it takes to kill them. They will attack you, it is true ; but then they must treble you in numbers ; and if they fail in killing, or completely overpowering, you at the onset, ten to one but they will beat a hasty retreat and leave you master of the field.

Of such dastardly wretches was composed the party which had assailed us. Although vastly superior to us in numbers, they now seemed completely thunderstruck at the result of an attack which doubtless they had counted on as certain victory. Five of their party had already bitten the dust, and yet not one of us had been touched. Notwithstanding this, even, had they possessed one-half the courage and daring of their Eastern forefathers, they might to all appearance have annihilated us. But, no ! they *dared* not longer fight for victory. Like frightened poltroons, as they were, they wavered for a moment, and then, as their last hope, made a rush for our animals, with the intention of seizing and making off with them, and thus leaving us to foot our long journey. But even in this they failed, through their own cowardice ; for, comprehending their intent, the trappers, with yells as savage as their own, sprung from their trees and bounded towards them ; whereupon they instantly abandoned their design, and again most ingloriously fled.

Two of our party, however, Fiery Ned and Rash Will, were far from being satisfied with even this victory. Maddened with rage and a desire for further revenge, they actually set off in hot pursuit of the fugitives, and quickly disappeared from our view. For a time we could hear them shouting and yelling ; but gradually the sounds grew fainter and more faint, until at last nothing whatever could be distinguished.

"The infarnal skunks!" said Black George, stepping out from behind his tree, and giving vent to a quiet, inward laugh, peculiar to men of his profession. "Reckon they'll stay put a few, and not trouble us agin in a hurry;" and again he laughed as before. "But what fools Ned and Will is! They're never content with a fa'r whip, but must al'ays be tryin' to do a heap more; and some day they'll git thar ha'r raised, and go under with a vengeance, or I'm no sinner! But I say, Tom?"

"Wall, hoss?"

"Didn't we throw 'em purty?"

"Wall we did, old coon!"

"I'll be dog-gone ef we didn't! Come, let's lift thar ha'r—augh!"

With this both trappers drew their knives, and, producing small sandstones, proceeded to sharpen them, with as much indifference as if they were about to slice a buffalo instead of dip them in the blood of human beings. When done, their whetstones were carefully replaced; and then turning to me, who with Huntly and Teddy had meantime gathered around the two, the old mountaineer said:

"Boy, you've done so'thin' for the fust time, and needn't be ashamed on't. Throwed him cold in his tracks, I'll be dog-gone ef you didn't!" and he nodded toward the Indian I had slain. "Wall, he's your meat; and so at him, and raise his top-knot afore he gits cold."

I shuddered at the bare thought of such barbarity, and involuntarily shrunk back.

"Oh, then you're a little squeamish, hey? Wall, I've heern tell o' sich things afore; but it won't last long, Bosson, take my word for't! Ef you don't raise ha'r afore you're a thousand year older, jest call me a liar and stop off my bacca!"

"No!" I replied, firmly; "I could never be brought to degrade myself by a custom which originated with, and, if it must still be practiced, should ever be confined to, the native savage! I may kill an Indian in my own defense, but I cannot mutilate him when dead! I was bred in a very different school."

"Bread be durned!" returned Black George, not comprehending my meaning. "This here ain't bread—it's meat; and as to skule, as you calls it, why that ar belongs to the settlements, and hain't got nothin' to do out hereaways in the woods! Eh! Tom?"

"Wall it hain't."

"No, I'll be rumfuzzled ef it has! And so, stranger, ef you wants to show you're smart a heap, you'll jest lift that ar skunk's ha'r and say no more about it! Eh! Tom?"

"Fact!—augh!"

"No," I rejoined, in a decisive tone, "I will have nothing to do with it! If you choose to scalp the Indian, that is no business of mine; but I will not so degrade myself!"

"Wall, ef your mind's made up, in course it's no use o' talking; and so, Tom, let's begin to slice."

At this moment we heard the report of a distant rifle, quickly followed by another.

"Them boys is eyther throwed now, or else some Injins has got rubbed out," observed Black George, indifferently. "Come, Tom—let's lift!"

Saying this, the old trapper and his companion set about their bloody work. The first Indian they came to was not dead; and running his knife into his heart, with a barbarous coolness that made me shudder, Black George observed:

"That's your meat, Tom."

He then passed on, leaving the latter to finish the bloody task. Bending over the now dead savage, and seizing him by the hair of the head—which, instead of a long lock or cue, as worn by some tribes, was short and ridged, like the comb of a fowl—Daring Tom ran his knife round the skull bone with a scientific flourish, tore off the scalp, and, knocking it on the ground, to free it as much as possible from gouts of blood, coolly attached it to his girdle and proceeded to the next.

"What a horrid custom!" I exclaimed, turning to Huntly.

"It is, truly!" he replied. "But then, you know, Frank, it is one that belongs to the Indian and mountain-

eer ; and as we have come among them voluntarily, we have no right of course to quarrel with them for it."

"Be jabbers!" cried Teddy ; "is it murthering the Injins twice they is, now, your honors?"

"It would seem so," replied Huntly, with a smile.

"Faith, your honor, and it's mesilf as thinks they naad it, sure, the blathering spalpeens, to be coming round us paceable citizens wid their nonsense, and cuthing our throats ! Och ! if I'd knowed how to lit off this bothersome article, (holding up his rifle), I'd a killed a dozen o' the baastly crathurs, so I would !"

"Why, Teddy," I rejoined, "I thought you knew how to shoot a rifle ! at least you told us so."

Teddy scratched his head, and put on a very comical look, as he replied :

"Yes, but ye sae, your honor, it was an Irish rifle I was spaking of, barring that it wasn't made in Ireland at all, at all, but in France, jist."

"But I thought they did not allow you to use rifles in Ireland, Teddy?"

"No more they don't ; but thin, ye sae, it isn't sich murthering things as this now they uses."

"What then?"

"Why, I most forgit mesilf," returned the Irishman, with a perplexed look, again scratching his head. "Och ! now I come to think on't, I belave it shot wid a long stick ; and that it wasn't mesilf as shot it at all, at all, but me mother's father that knowed sich things—pace to his ashes !"

"Teddy," I rejoined, assuming a serious tone, which I was very far from feeling, "it is evident that this is the first rifle you ever laid hands on, and that the story you told us on the boat, about your exploits in shooting, was without the least foundation whatever."

"Ah, troth, it's like it may be !" answered the Hibernian, penitently, with a sigh ; "it's like it may be, your honor ; for divil a thing else can me make out of it. But, ye sae, ye questioned me close now ; and I's afeard, that, didn't I have the qualifications ye axed, I'd not be naaded ; and as I saan ye was raal gintlemen, and no blathers of spalpeens, it was going wid yoursel's Teddy O'Lagherty

was afther doing, if he told a story, jist—for which the Lord forgive me !”

“ Well, well, Teddy, never mind,” I said, smiling ; “ I will show you the use of the rifle the first convenient opportunity ; and so let what is past be forgotten.”

“ Ah !” cried the grateful Irishman, doffing his beaver and making a low bow ; “ I knowed ye was gintlemen, your honors, every inch of yees, and wouldn’t be hard upon a poor forlorner like mesilf !”

“ Hark !” exclaimed Huntly ; “ listen !” and at the moment we heard the gloomy howl of a pack of wolves.

“ They already smell the feast prepared for them,” I rejoined.

“ Well, Frank, let us return to our camp-fire, for I see the trappers have nearly completed their unenviable task.”

Acting upon his suggestion, we set forward, and, gaining the fire, were soon joined by Black George and Darling Tom, who came up with five bloody scalps dangling at their girdles—bringing with them also some two or three rifles, a fresh supply of powder and ball, and various other trifles which they had taken from the dead Indians.

“ I think we can count a coup this heat !” observed the old mountaineer, with his peculiar, quiet laugh ; “ eh ! Tom ?”

“ We can’t do nothin’ else !” was the satisfactory response.

“ I say, Tom, them wolves smell blood !”

“ Wall, they does !”

“ Thar’s plenty o’ meat for ’em, any how ; and ef they’ll jest foller us, and them skunks of Pawnees want to try this here over agin, we’ll make ’em fat ! Eh ! Tom ?”

“ Will so-o !”

“ Yes, I’ll be dog-gone ef we don’t ! But I say, Tom—ain’t it most time for Rash and Fire to be in ?”

“ I reckon !”

“ Hope they didn’t git throwed ! It ’ud be a pity to hev them go under jest now—and would spile all our sport.”

“ Wall, it would, hoss !”

"Hark ! thar goes a whistle ! That's them, or I'm a bull-head !"

"'Taint nobody else !" responded Daring Tom. |

"All right. Augh ! Let's smoke !"

Squatting themselves on the ground, cross-legged, the trappers filled their pipes, and commenced puffing away as though nothing had happened to disturb their equanimity.

Such perfect recklessness of life, such indifference to danger, I had never seen displayed before ; and though I abhorred some of their customs, I could not but admire their coolness and valor.

Their sense of hearing, I soon discovered, was far more acute than mine ; for when the old trapper spoke of the whistle of his comrades, I could not, for the life of me, detect a distant sound proceeding from human lips. But that he was right was soon evident ; for in less than five minutes after, Fiery Ned and Rash Will made their appearance ; and quietly stealing up to the circle, they threw themselves upon the ground, without a remark.

At the belt of each hung a fresh scalp, showing that two more of the enemy had become their victims.

For some time the two smoked away in silence ; and then suggesting to the others the propriety of joining them, all four were soon in full blast. After a little, they began to talk over their exploits ; and amusing themselves in this way for an hour or more, one after another straightened himself out on the earth, an example which Teddy soon imitated, and in five minutes all were lost in sleep.

As for Huntly and myself, slumber had fled our eyelids ; and, stirring up the fire, we seated ourselves at a little distance and talked till daylight—I narrating my singular dream, and both commenting upon it.

All night long we heard the howling of the ravenous wolves, as they tore the flesh from the bones of our dead foes, and we occasionally caught a gleam of their fiery eye-balls when they ventured nearer than usual to our camp.

CHAPTER X.

THE THUNDER-STORM.



T an early in the morning we resumed our journey.

As we moved along, I beheld the bones of two of our late foes, basking white and ghastly in the sunlight, their clean-licked, shiny skulls, hollow sockets, and grinning teeth and jaws, fairly making my flesh creep.

And the more so when I took into consideration that only a few hours before these same bones belonged to animated human beings, and that a mere turn of the wheel of fate might have placed me in their position and they in mine.

Death is a solemn thing to contemplate at any time, and I was now in a mood to feel its gloom in an unusual degree. My dream, although I tried to dispel it as only a dream, still made a deep impression upon my mind; and this, together with what had subsequently occurred, and the remembrance of the conversation I had held with my friend the morning previous, touching Lilian, all tended to depress my spirits and make me melancholy.

At length, to rouse me from my sinking stupor, I turned my eyes upon Huntly; but perceiving that he too was deep in thought, I did not disturb his reverie; while my own mind, settling back into itself, if I may be permitted the expression, wandered far away to the past, recalled a thousand old scenes, and then leaped forward to the future and became perplexed in conjectures regarding my final fate.

About noon we reached the banks of the Blue River, and, as on the preceding day, halted a few minutes to rest and refresh ourselves and animals.

Here I noticed trees of oak, ash, walnut and hickory, with occasionally one of cottonwood and willow.

The bottoms of this stream are often wide and fertile, on which the wild pea vine grows in abundance. The pea itself is somewhat smaller than that grown in the settlements, and can be used as an esculent, its flavor being agreeable.

As our meat was now running short, Daring Tom observed that he would "make so'thin' come;" and, setting forth with his rifle, soon returned heavily laden with wild turkeys.

Hastily dressing these, we threw them into our possible-sacks and again set forward.

Traveling some fifteen miles through woodland and over prairie, we encamped at last in a beautiful little grove of ash and hickory, on the margin of a creek that flowed into the Blue.

The day had been excessively hot and sultry, and all of us were much fatigued.

Starting a fire, as usual, we cooked some of our turkey meat, and found it very delicious.

As no Indian sign had been discovered through the day, it was thought unnecessary to set a guard. We accordingly all stretched ourselves upon the earth around the fire, and, in a few minutes, with the exception of myself, all were sound asleep.

I could not rest. I tried to, but in vain. The air was filled with mosquitoes, and various other insects, attracted hither by the fire-light, and they annoyed me exceedingly. This was not all. My mind, as in fact it had been throughout the day, was sorely depressed. A thousand thoughts, that I vainly strove to banish, obtruded themselves upon me. In spite of myself, I thought of my dream. Pshaw! why should that trouble me? It could not be true, I knew; and was only caused by the previous remarks of Huntly, my excited feelings, and surrounding circumstances. Still it came up in my mind, as startingly as I had dreamed it, and, in spite of my scoffings, with every appearance of reality. I was not naturally superstitious, and did not believe in dreams—but this one haunted me as a foreboding of evil to her I loved; and as I lay and meditated, I half

formed the resolution of setting out in the morning upon my return, already sick of my undertaking.

It is one thing to read of adventures in others, and another to experience them ourselves, and this I now felt very keenly. To strengthen my resolution to return, I pictured the home of my parents, the sadness which I knew must be preying upon them on account of my absence, and the flash of joy that would light up their faces and warm their hearts on beholding their only son once more seated at their fireside, never to depart again while he or they were blessed with life. I thought over all this, and grew stronger in my new resolve; and had it not been for the whimsical fear of ridicule—the idle jest of some foppish fool, for whose opinion or regard in any other way I would not have cared a straw—it is more than probable that this narrative would never have been written.

What a powerful engine is ridicule! It is the battering-ram of the mind, and will often destroy by a single blow the mightiest fabric of reason. It is used by fools and men whose minds are too imbecile to cope with the edifice of thought which towers above their limited grasp; and yet the very architect of such construction fears it, as does the poor red man the annihilating artillery of the pale-face.

I lay and thought; and the more I thought, the more restless I became. I rolled to and fro in an agony of mind that at last became intolerable, and I arose.

Stealing quietly from the sleeping circle, I proceeded to the creek, and, having moistened my parched and feverish lips, and bathed my heated temples and brow, I took my way thence to a little bluff on the opposite side, whence I could overlook the valley for a considerable extent.

Seating myself upon a rock, I gazed around. Below was our camp-fire, brightly burning, beside which I could trace, with a shadowy indistinctness, the outlines of the sleepers' dark forms. There they lay, all unconscious to the outer world, perhaps enjoying the pleasure of some delightful dream. How I envied them their sleep! Beyond them, by the same light, I could faintly perceive

our animals—hopped, but not picketed, the latter being thought unnecessary—quietly grazing.

It was a warm, still, starlight night. Above me the heavens were brilliantly studded with myriads of shining orbs, whose light fell softly and sweetly upon the sleeping earth. Here, not a scud floated in the clear atmosphere; but in the west I could perceive huge, black clouds, lifting their ill-shaped heads above the horizon, darting forth the red bolts of heaven, while a far-off rumbling sound came jarringly upon my ear.

Fixing my gaze at last in this direction, I sat and watched the rapid progress of an approaching storm.

On it came like a mighty squadron, a few fleecy clouds as banners thrown out in advance, behind which flashed and thundered its dread artillery, making the very earth tremble beneath the sound.

From youth up, the rapid play of lightning had strongly affected my nervous system and made me a coward; and now—lonely, sad and gloomy—I was in a proper condition to feel its effects more sensibly than ever.

Half an hour passed, and the rolling clouds had darkened the western heavens, while the almost incessant flashes of fire seemed to set the earth in a blaze, leaving it the next moment shrouded in a darkness almost impenetrable.

Dismal as was the scene, I sat with my eyes riveted upon it, while a painful sense of awe made my limbs feel weak and my blood move sluggishly through my veins, or rush over me with flashes of feverish heat. Several times I arose with the intention of returning to camp, but as often resumed my former position, as if enchained to the spot by some magical spell.

On came the storm with startling velocity; and presently I could see the tops of distant trees bending to the blast—the rain falling in broad, white sheets, as if about to deluge the earth—and hear the truly dismal roaring of the rushing winds. I would have returned to my companions now, but our camp afforded no protection, and I fancied myself as safe where I was.

At last it broke upon me in all its force; and such a

storm I never witnessed before, and hope never to again.

I feel myself incompetent to describe it. The rain fell in torrents ; the wind blew a perfect hurricane ; and tall old trees, which had perhaps stood for centuries, were broken and uprooted ; while others, together with surrounding rocks, were shattered by the fiery bolts, whose crashing reports fairly deafened me.

How I maintained my position—why I was not hurled headlong down the cliff—is still a mystery to myself.

Occasionally I caught a glimpse of my companions moving about below, evidently trying to secure their powder from the storm ; while Huntly was running to and fro in search of his friend, and to all appearance surprised, alarmed and distressed.

Our animals too had become frightened ; and, rearing and plunging, they soon broke loose from their tethers and dashed madly over the plain in every direction.

I would have joined my companions now, but this had become impossible ; for the rain had already swelled the little creek between me and them into a mighty stream, that rolled its dark, angry waters with fury below me, and added its sullen roar to the howlings of the storm. I shouted, but my voice was lost even to myself in the mightier ones of the furious elements.

Two hours—two long, never-to-be-forgotten hours—did the storm rage thus in fury ; and in those two hours methought I lived a lifetime. Then to my joy it began to abate ; and in half an hour more I again beheld the twinkling stars through rents in the driving clouds ; while the flashing lightning and the roaring thunder, gradually becoming less and less distinct to eye and ear, told me the devastating storm was fast speeding on toward the east.

I now descended to the creek to join my companions ; but finding it too much swollen to attempt a passage with safety, I again ascended the cliff, and shouted to them to assure them of my safety.

At first I could not make them hear ; but, after repeated trials, I had the satisfaction of receiving an

answering shout from Huntly, who immediately set off in the direction whence he supposed my voice proceeded.

After a short time, during which we both called to each other continually, Huntly was enabled to make out my locality—but the creek prevented our meeting during the night.

At day-break I discovered him and Teddy standing on the opposite side; and as the flood had a little subsided, I plunged in and swam across—not, however, without much difficulty and danger, nor until the rushing waters had borne me some forty or fifty yards down the stream.

No sooner was I safe on the bank, than Huntly threw his arms around my neck and wept like a child.

“Thank God, Frank, my friend,” he exclaimed, “that I am able to clasp you once again! Oh, if you could but know my feelings of last night! I thought you were lost—lost to me forever!” and again he was forced to dash the tears from his eyes. “But tell me, Frank—how came you there?”

I proceeded to detail every particular.

“A horrible night to you, too, Frank!” said Huntly, in reply. “But hereafter, my friend, you must not steal away from me in this way. If you have troubles, share them with me.”

Teddy was greatly rejoiced to see me also; and he got me by the hand, and by the leg, and capered around me like a delighted child—at the same time uttering various phrases in his peculiar style, which, in spite of all that had happened, did not fail to amuse and sometimes make me laugh aloud.

I found the trappers surly and grumbling at what they considered their ill-luck—being for the most part in the loss of a few pounds of powder and their mules—all of which animals had escaped, and also our horses.

“Augh!” grunted Black George as I came up. “Glad to see you, boy! Thought you’d gone under. It was a screecher of a night, wasn’t it? Lost heaps of powder, and all the critters gone to durnation. Augh!”

My powder had fortunately been so packed that

nearly all was safe ; and as I had a great store on hand, I gave each of the mountaineers a pound, which served to put them in a better humor.

We now separated and set off in different directions to hunt up our animals, with the understanding that this should be our rendezvous.

We had a wearisome time of it, and it was late in the day before we all got together again. All, however, had then been recovered ; and setting forward once more, rather briskly, we finally encamped some ten miles further on.

CHAPTER XI.

ONWARD TO FORT LARAMIE.



HE next morning we set forward again, and keeping a northwesterly course, mostly over a rolling prairie, encamped on the second night on the banks of the Nebraska, or Platte River.

This river is very shallow, and flows over a sandy bed. We found the bottom at this point some three or four miles wide, devoid of a tree, and covered with excellent grass, besprinkled with a salinous substance, which caused our animals to devour it greedily.

Setting our faces westward, we now followed the course of the Platte for several days, without a single incident occurring worth being recorded. The Platte bottoms we found to vary from two to four miles in breadth, and in some places our animals fared slimly.

On the fourth day, Fiery Ned shot a fat buffalo, which was the first I had ever seen close at hand.

This animal dies very hard, even when mortally wounded ; and an individual, unacquainted with its nature—or, as the mountaineers would term him, a greenhorn—though never so good a marksman, would as-

surely fail, using the hunters' phrase, "to throw him in his tracks." One would suppose that a shot about the head, or central part of the body, would prove fatal—but nothing is more erroneous. To kill a bull, the ball must either divide his spine, or enter his body behind the shoulder, a few inches above the brisket—this being the only point through which his heart and lungs are accessible. And even here, the vital part of all vitality, with a ball directly through his heart, I was informed by one of the hunters that he had known an old bull run half a mile before falling.

The buffalo killed was a fat cow; and turning her upon her back, the trappers proceeded to dress her in the real mountain style. Parting the skin from head to tail with a sharp knife, directly across the belly, they peeled down the hide on either side; and then, taking from her the "hump rib," "tender loin," "fleece," "tongue," and "boudins," they left the remainder, with the exception of the skin, which was thrown across one of the mules, to the vigilant care of the wolves. The "boudin," a portion of the entrails, is considered by the mountaineers the tit-bit of all. Slightly browned over a fire, it is swallowed, yard after yard, without being separated; and, I may add, without resulting in the least inconvenience to the gormand.

Through this section of country I observed innumerable buffalo paths, running from the bluffs to the river and crossing each other in every direction. These paths present a striking appearance to one unused to the sight, being more than a foot in width, some three or four inches in depth, and as smooth and even as if cut artificially.

But to Huntly and myself, the most amusing and interesting sights of all we saw on the route, were the towns of the prairie-dog, which are to be found at different intervals along the whole course of the sandy Platte, and through several of which we passed. The first one we came to, so astonished and interested us, that Huntly, Teddy and myself dismounted to take a closer view; while the trappers, being of course familiar with such things, steadily pursued their way.

The prairie-dog is above the size of a large gray squirrel, somewhat longer than a Guinea-pig, of a brownish or sandy hue, with a head somewhat resembling a bull-dog. Being of a social disposition, they collect together in large bodies, and build their towns on a gravelly plain, some of them being miles in extent, and with a population equaling the largest cities of America, or even Europe. Their earthen houses, which are from two to three feet in height, are made in the form of a cone. They are entered by a hole in the top or apex, which descends vertically some three feet or more, and then takes an oblique course and connects with others in every direction. Their streets are laid out with something approaching regularity; and they evidently have a sort of police, and laws to govern them, not unlike those of superior and more enlightened beings. In some of the towns, a house larger than ordinary occupies a central position, which is tenanted by a sleek, fat dog, supposed to be the presiding functionary of the place, whose sole employment appears to be in sunning himself outside of his domicile, and noting with patriarchal gravity the doings of his inferiors.

The town which we halted to examine was one of the larger class, and covered an area, to the best of my judgment, of at least five hundred acres. On our approach, a certain portion of the little fellows ran to the mouth of their holes, and, squatting down, commenced a shrill barking, not unlike that made by a toy dog—whereupon the pups and smaller-sized animals betook themselves with the utmost dispatch to their burrows. A nearer approach drove the more daring under cover, whence they took the liberty of peeping out to examine us, and occasionally of uttering a shrill bark, as a gentle hint that our company was anything but agreeable.

The food of these interesting little fellows consists, for the most part, of prairie grass and roots. They live a life of constant alarm—being watched and pounced upon continually by the wolf, the hawk, the eagle, and so forth. They are very hospitable to such animals as choose to come and live peaceably among them; the screech owl and rattlesnake are their constant guests;

and it is not unusual, I was told, to find all three burrowed together in one hole. They are sometimes eaten by the Indian and mountaineer.

Spending an hour or more in examining the town, we remounted our horses and soon overtook the trappers—Teddy observing, as we quitted the village :

“Faith, your honors, but thim is queer bir-r-ds now, isn’t they? Och! be me mother’s hair! it’s like they’ve bin down to St. Louey and got the notion in their heads and think they can baat the city, the spalpeens! I’d like ’em to go and sae Dublin, now—maybe that ’ud astonish ’em a wee bit, and give ’em some new idees respicting public idifices, jist. Ochone! Ireland’s the place to taach ’em—the baastly serpints of bir-r-ds that they is.”

The first natural object of curiosity I beheld, after crossing the South Fork of the Platte, was the Solitary Tower, opposite to which we encamped, on the margin of a small stream called Little Creek. This tower, composed of sand and clay, resembles a stone edifice, and, being some seven or eight hundred feet high, can be seen at a distance of fifteen or twenty miles. To the distant beholder it presents the appearance of some mighty structure of feudal days; but a near view dispels the illusion, and the spectator sees before him only a rough, unseemly, but stupendous pile—thus verifying the words of the poet, that

“Distance lends enchantment to the view.”

I was informed by Black George that this tower could be ascended, though at some risk to the adventurer; and that he and another trapper had made the trial some years before, and spent one cold winter’s night in one of its damp crevices—escaping by this means a party of hostile savages who were on their trail. I did not attempt the ascent myself.

The following day, before noon, we reached Chimney Rock, another natural curiosity, which can be seen at a distance of thirty miles, and which afar off resembles a shot tower; but, as you near it, it gradually assumes the appearance of a haystack with a pole protruding from

the apex. It is about two hundred feet in height, and is composed of much the same substance as the Solitary Tower. The rains are gradually wearing it away, and in course of time it will cease to be an object of curiosity. Black George informed me that, twenty years before, it was at least a hundred and fifty or two hundred feet above its present elevation.

Pursuing our journey, we encamped in the evening on Scott's Bluffs, where we found a good spring and plenty of grass for our animals. As wood was abundant here, we started a fire; and while sitting around, discussing our meat and smoking our pipes, the old trapper, who had not been loquacious for several days, observed:

"Strangers, heyar's what can't look round this here spot without feelin' bad—I'll be dog-gone ef I kin?"

"And why so?" I asked.

"Case one o' the almightiest best fellers you ever seed, went under here. I knowed him like a trump; and he was one o' them chaps you could b'ar to talk about—real mountain grit, with a hand that ud make your fingers ache when he squeezed 'em, and a fist that could knock a hole into your upper story and let in the atmospheric ef he didn't like ye. Yes, he was one o' the purtiest men that ever raised ha'r, throwed buffier, trapped beaver, swallowed 'boudins,' or I'm a liar. But all wouldn't do. Death sot his trap and cotched him, and left jest a few floatin' sticks in the shape o' bones to let us know he was a goner. He died right down thar 'bout six paces from whar you're settin'."

"Tell us the story."

"It's purty easy told. Him and a heap o' other fellers had been up on a right smart trade with the Injins, and was a comin' down this way, going to the States, when a lot o' the cussed varmints jumped on to 'em, and stole every blessed thing they had, even to thar guns, powder, meat, and be durned to 'em. Wall, Jimmy Scott—him as I's tellin' about—he hadn't bin wall for a week, and gittin' aground o' fodder fetched him right over the coals. He kicked mighty hard at fust; but findin' it

wasn't no use, he gin in, and told them as was with him that his time was up, and he would hev to do the rest o' his trappin' in another country, and that they'd best put out while they'd got meat enough on thar bones to make wolves foller 'em. They hated to leave him like durnation—but they had to do it; and so they sot him up agin a rock and vamosed. This was about a mile down on t'other side thar; and arter they'd gone, Jimmy got up and paddled over here, whar he laid down and went a wolfin. Nobody ever seed Jimmy Scott arterward—but they found his floatin' sticks here, and gin this the name o' Scott's Bluffs."

The next day, long before sundown, we came in sight of Fort Laramie, where it was the intention of Huntly and myself to spend a few days, to refresh ourselves and rest our animals, before attempting the perilous journey of the mountains.

On our whole route, from the moment we crossed Kansas River, we had not been gladdened by the sight of a single white man but ourselves; and consequently my delight may be imagined, when I beheld the walls of this celebrated fortress appear in the distance, and felt that there at least I could rest in safety.

Fort Laramie stands upon slightly elevated ground, some two miles from the Platte, and on the west bank of Laramie Fork. It is a dirty and clumsy-looking edifice, built of adobes,* after the Mexican style, with walls some two feet in thickness and fifteen in height, in which are planted posts to support the roof, the whole being covered with a clay-like substance. Through this wall are two gateways, one at the north and the other at the south, and the top is surmounted by a wooden palisade. Over the main or front entrance is a square tower, built also of adobes; and at two angles, diagonally opposite each other, are large, square bastions, so arranged as to sweep the four faces of the walls. The center of the fort is an open square, quadrangular in shape, along the sides of which are dwellings, store-rooms, stables, carpenter

* Sun burned bricks.

shops, smith shops, offices, and so forth, all fronting upon the inner area.

This fort belongs to the North American Fur Company, and is a general rendezvous for traders, travelers, trappers, Indians and emigrants, on their way to and from the different trading posts, Oregon and the States. Here may be found representatives of all nations and colors, meeting on an equal footing, often drinking and gambling together, many of whom may be put down as implacable enemies, and who, at another time and place, would think nothing of cutting each others' throats. Here occasionally may be seen the Ponka, the Pawnee, the Crow, the Blackfoot, the Sioux and the Shoshone—intermingled with the Spaniard, the Frenchman, the Mexican, the Anglo-Saxon, the Dutchman and the Negro. The trapper comes in at certain seasons loaded with furs, and receives in exchange for them powder, lead, tobacco, whiskey, and the like, at the most exorbitant prices. Then generally follow a few days of dissipation—in feasting, gambling, drunkenness, and sometimes riot—when he finds all his hard earnings gone, and he obliged to betake himself again to the mountains to procure a new supply, to be squandered in the same reckless manner.

As we rode up to the fort, we noticed several Indians standing outside, carelessly leaning against the mud-covered walls, their persons bedecked with gew-gaws, and their faces bedaubed with paint, looking surly and ferocious, evidently under the excitement of liquor, and ready at any moment, did not their cowardice and fears restrain them, to take the life and scalp of the first white man that might come in their way. Standing among them, and addressing one who from his superiority of costume and equipments I judged to be a chief, was a man of small stature, mostly concealed under a large sarape and broad-brimmed sombrero.

“Wagh!” exclaimed Black George, with an indignant scowl; “ef thar ain’t one o’ them infernal Greasers, I wish I may be dogged! Wall, all I’ve got to say is, he’d better not come foolin’ round this child, or he’ll find his ha’r lifted. Eh! Ned?”

"Won't nothin' short."

Passing through the gateway, we soon had the satisfaction of seeing our animals well disposed of; and entering the common reception-room, we took a friendly drink together; after which, lighting our pipes (Huntly and myself had already adopted this habit since leaving home), we strolled around the fortress to gratify our curiosity and while away the time till supper.

We found everything in perfect order, all the various compartments cleanly, and the fort well garrisoned by a dozen hardy fellows, each of whom had seen more or less service, and the commander of whom was at least a veteran in experience if not in years.

The fort was not crowded by any means—it not being the season of the year for the traders and trappers to be "in"—but still the number of guests was quite respectable. There were a few families of emigrants on their way to Oregon and California; and one or two homesick ones on their return to the States, looking pale, sickly and dejected. Some half a dozen Indians, two or three Mexicans, as many French *voyageurs*, four or five trappers and hunters—all of whom were recognized by our companions—a brace of Yankee speculators, another of *courreurs des bois*,* together with the squaw-wives and children of the garrison—completed, as far as I could judge by a hasty glance, the present occupants of the station.

On the eastern side of the fort we found an additional wall to the one I have described, which connected with the main one at both extremities and inclosed ground for stables and corral. A large gateway opened into this from the southern side, and a postern communicated with it from the main inclosure. Here were a few mules and cattle belonging to the emigrants, while in the stables our own horses were enjoying the best the country afforded, for which of course we expected to pay at least six prices. In view of this important item, and their incapacity to meet it, the mountaineers had taken care to put their mules on less expensive diet.

* Itinerant traders or peddlers.

In the main inclosure, or common, were several heavy Pittsburg wagons, some of which were undergoing repairs at the hands of the various mechanics employed about the station.

As we drew near them, after leaving the corral, we noticed that several had left their employment and collected in a group around some object which we could not make out from where we stood; while others had suspended their labors and were gazing in the same direction, evidently on the point of joining their comrades.

Huntly and I, being now by ourselves, and our curiosity excited, we eagerly sprung forward, and, elbowing our way through the fast thickening crowd, to our surprise beheld what I shall proceed to describe in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MYSTERIOUS EQUESTRIENNE.



IN the center of the ring stood an Indian pony of the largest class, and the most beautiful animal I had ever seen. His color was a jet black, and so glossy that it seemed to possess the power of reflection. Every point and limb was perfectly developed, with legs sleek and slim, and a beautifully arched neck, on which was a head that bore the look of conscious superiority and pride. His trappings were in perfect keeping with all the rest. A small, delicately-formed Spanish saddle, designed for an equestrienne, surmounted his back, underneath which was a saddle-blanket of wampum, most beautifully wrought, with fine, shiny beads of all colors, into various birds and flowers, and which, being long and hanging low, almost enveloped him in its ample folds. Even his bridle, martingale, reins and belly-girth were worked in

the same beautiful manner, with beads of red, white and blue. He was walking to and fro, snuffing the air, pawing the ground, and occasionally turning his gaze upon the crowd, with a proud look, as if conscious he was an object both of curiosity and admiration.

Various were the remarks of surprise and delight which were passed upon him by the excited spectators, some of whom ventured to pat his sleek neck and rub his head.

At length one strapping fellow caught him by the bridle, and placed his hand upon the saddle, as if with the intention of vaulting upon his back. But this, according to the pony's notion, was carrying familiarity a little too far; and with a loud snort, a rear and plunge, he tore himself away; nor would he afterward permit a hand to touch him, although he still remained quietly in the ring.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Huntly; "did you ever before see the like, Frank? Did you ever before see anything of the brute creation so beautiful?"

"Never in my life," I replied; "and what is more, I am anxious to behold his rider—for by the saddle it is a female."

"True; I did not think of that; and if she prove half as beautiful, by my faith I fear I shall find myself in love with her."

"Notwithstanding the lovely Unknown—eh! Charley?"

"Come, come—no home-thrusts now," answered Huntly, good-humoredly.

"Wall, heyar's what seed a good many sights in my time, but I'll be dog-gone ef ever I seed anything o' the hoss kind as could hold a primin' to this critter!" said the voice of Black George, who had come up behind us.

"But who and where is the rider?" I asked, turning to him.

"Don't know whar, but s'pect it's some squaw or other—augh!"

"The rider is an Indian female, the most perfect I ever beheld," rejoined a stranger at my elbow, and

whom I recognized as one of the speculators previously mentioned.

"Where is she? where is she?" cried several voices, before I had time to respond to my informant; and immediately the stranger became the center of observation.

"She is now closeted with the commander of the garrison."

"Then perhaps she brings important news?" observed Huntly.

"Nothing more probable, sir," was the reply. "There is a good deal of dissatisfaction among the Indians, I understand."

"Indeed!" I replied. "And do you think the route westward particularly dangerous at this time?"

"I do; for rumors have reached us that the Crows, the Oglallahs, the Gros Ventres, the Cheyennes, and one or two other tribes, have vowed to take vengeance on all the whites that fall in their way; and it is said, I do not know with how much truth, that the Oglallahs are out on the Black Hill range, and in the vicinity of the Red Buttes, while the Crows are skulking through the valley of the Sweetwater."

"Why, this is alarming, truly!" I rejoined; "and certainly discouraging to those who, like ourselves, are going further west merely for adventure and amusement."

"If adventure or *amusement* is your only object in crossing the Rocky Mountains, take my advice, young men, and either turn back or remain where you are."

"And yet what for should they turn back?" said a voice behind us. "All men ar' born to die; and it's not probable any will go before thar time. Courage and resolution ar' everything in this part of the world."

I turned around and beheld in the speaker a young man of fair stature and robust frame, over whose clean-shaven face time had not drawn a wrinkle. His features were regular and prepossessing. The general expression of his intelligent countenance was so reserved and unobtrusive, that I really felt surprised he should have hazarded the remarks just quoted, without first being called

upon for his opinion. To all appearance he had not seen over twenty-five winters, though in reality he might have been much older, so difficult was it to determine by his countenance. He had light hair—a keen, restless, eagle-like gray eye—an ample forehead—and a skin which, but for exposure to all kinds of weather, would doubtless have been as fair and as soft as a lady's. His limbs, though slender, were straight and sinewy, with muscles of iron; and being something of a connoisseur in such matters, I at once put him down as an active, and, for his inches, a powerful man. He was costumed in the usual mountain style, and I judged had just entered the fort, as I did not remember having seen him before.

As he spoke, I noticed that several of the bystanders whispered to others, and that instantly all eyes became fixed upon him, with an air of curiosity for which I could not account.

The stranger, to whom he had addressed his remarks, coolly examined him from head to foot, as one who felt a little nettled at his interference, and wished to assure himself of the exact importance to be attached to his words before venturing a reply. By a slight curl of the lip into something like a sneer, I saw at once he was not a judge of human nature, and had underrated the newcomer not a little. He was himself a supercilious man, who delighted in giving advice with a patronizing air, and consequently did not care to have his wise counsel questioned by what he evidently considered an interloper. He, therefore, after taking a complete and rather insolent survey of the other's person, replied, rather pompously :

“Why should they turn back, say you? Because there is danger, great danger, to them if they advance further, as any one who is at all acquainted with this part of the country must be aware. If you had traveled it as much as *I* have, sir (there was an important stress on the pronoun), you would, I fancy, understand the value of my advice; but young men (the speaker was about thirty), on their first hunt, are apt to be very knowing and imprudent—and, sir, I may add, without wishing to be personal, a little *impudent* also.”

Here the speaker straightened himself up with an air of importance, and glanced around upon the spectators, where he saw many a quiet smile, which he was fain to attribute to silent approval of his own lofty and conclusive argument.

The new-comer also smiled slightly, as he quietly asked :

" Might I know, sir, how much of the country you've traveled ?"

" Thousands of miles, young man—thousands of miles, sir ! Yes, sir ! I have been twice to Oregon and once to California."

" Is that all ?"

" That all, sir ! Umph ! that, let me tell you, is a good deal, sir, as you will find when *you* have gone over the half of it."

" I think I've done that already—at least that's my impression," was the somewhat nettling answer ; which was rendered none the less so to the speculator by a few half suppressed titters and one hearty laugh from the crowd.

" *Indeed*, young man ! Pray be so good as to inform us *where* you have been ?"

" It would be much easier to tell you whar I've *not* been," answered the other pleasantly. " But I may say, without fear of contradiction, that I've seen nearly every foot of ground from the Yellow Stone to the Spanish Peaks—from the Mississippi to the Pacific Ocean."

" Your name, stranger ?" said the other, a little crest-fallen.

" I'm called Kit Carson."

At the quiet mention of that renowned name, better known on the mountains and over the broad West than that of any other living being, and which was as familiar to me as a household word, I involuntarily gave a start of surprise ; while three deafening cheers went up from the crowd, mingled with boisterous shouts of laughter, to the no small chagrin and mortification of the pompous speculator, who muttered something which to me sounded very much like an oath.

Here, then, stood the famous Kit Carson ! a being I

had long had a secret desire to behold, but whom I had always pictured to myself as huge, rough, brawny and ferocious. Nor could I bring myself to realize that the person before me was that same incarnate devil in Indian fight I had heard him represented, and who had killed and scalped more savages in the same number of years than any two hunters west of the old Mississippi.

When the laugh and tumult had somewhat subsided, the stranger, anxious to escape ridicule, observed :

"Gentlemen, I acknowledge my verdancy, and feel that I owe you all a treat. Kit Carson, your hand ! and how will you have yours—mixed or clear?"

Another burst of merriment broke from the crowd, with three hearty cheers for the speculator and the prospect of a speedy "wet" all round.

Suddenly the boisterous tumult subsided, as if by magic, and not a man ventured a remark above a whisper, while the eyes of each became fixed upon some object on the opposite side of the square.

"Stand back ! stand back ! She comes ! she comes !" I heard whispered on all sides of me.

"Look, Frank—look !" said Huntly, in a suppressed voice, clutching my arm nervously.

I did look ; and what I beheld I feel myself incompetent to describe and do the subject justice.

Before me, perfectly erect, her tiny feet scarce seeming to touch the ground she trod, was a being which required no great stretch of imagination to fancy just dropped from some celestial sphere. She was a little above medium in stature, as straight as an arrow, and with a form as symmetrical and faultless as a Venus. Twenty summers (I could not realize she had ever seen a winter) had molded her features into what I may term a classic beauty, as if chiseled from marble by the hand of a master. Her skin was dark, but not more so than a Creole's, and with nothing of the brownish or reddish hue of the native Indian. It was beautifully clear too, and apparently of a velvet-like softness. Her hair was a glossy black, and her hazel eyes were large and lustrous, fringed with long lashes, and arched by fine,

penciled brows. Her profile was straight from forehead to chin, and her full face oval, lighted with a soul of feeling, fire and intelligence. A well-formed mouth, guarded by two plump lips, was adorned by a beautiful set of teeth, partially displayed when she spoke or smiled. A slightly aquiline nose gave an air of decision to the whole countenance, and rendered its otherwise almost too effeminate expression noble, lofty and commanding.

Her costume was singular, and such as could not fail to attract universal attention. A scarlet waistcoat concealed a well-developed bust, to which were attached short sleeves and skirts—the latter coming barely to the knees, something after the fashion of the short frock worn by the danseuse of the present day. These skirts were showily embroidered with wampum, and a wampum belt passed around her waist, in which glittered a silver-mounted Spanish dirk. From the frock downward, leggings and moccasins, beautifully wrought into various figures with beads, inclosed the legs and feet. A tiara of many colored feathers, to which were attached little bells, that tinkled as she walked, surmounted the head; and a bracelet of gold and gems on either well-rounded arm, with a necklace of a similar kind, completed her costume and ornaments.

With a proud carriage, and an unabashed look from her dark, eloquent eyes, she advanced a few paces, glanced loftily around upon the surprised and admiring spectators, and then struck the palms of her hands together in rapid succession.

In a moment her Indian pony came prancing to her side.

With a single bound she vaulted into the saddle, and, gracefully waving us a silent adieu, vanished through the open gateway.

Rushing out of the fort, the excited crowd followed her with their eyes till her beautiful form became completely lost in the neighboring forest.

“Who is she? who can she be?” cried a dozen persons at once.

"PRAIRIE FLOWER, or I'm a durned old buzzard!" exclaimed a well-known voice in reply.

I turned and beheld Black George already working himself up to a great pitch of excitement.

CHAPTER XIII.

PREPARING FOR BATTLE.



THE news brought by Prairie Flower we learned in the course of the evening was of the utmost importance—being to the effect that a large band of warriors, composed chiefly of Oglallahs and Cheyennes, had taken up their position in the vicinity of Bitter Cottonwood, a place some twenty-five miles distant, and had vowed to cut off all the whites that came that way, either going to or returning from Oregon.

The result of this information was to cause no little alarm in the station, particularly among the emigrants, who, being for the greater part composed of women and children, were in no fit condition to brave the assaults of a blood-thirsty body of savages.

But who was Prairie Flower?—the mysterious messenger that belonged to the Indians, and yet came like a guardian angel to warn the whites of their danger? Who was she indeed! None could answer. To all save the commander of the garrison and Black George (who now had to rehearse his remarkable story a dozen times, to gratify the curiosity of the excited inquirers, and who became a personage of no little importance in consequence), she was an utter stranger; and, for all any one knew to the contrary, might have dropped from the skies, a lovely being from a fairer realm.

The commander of the garrison, whom I shall term Captain Balcolm, had seen her once before, when she

came to warn him against the Sioux, who were meditating a descent upon the fort, a surprise and general massacre of its inmates, and whose design by this timely notice was thwarted; but as to who she was, how she gained her information, to what tribe she belonged, or why she was permitted to do these good acts and escape, he could give no satisfactory reply. On both occasions she had required a private interview with him; and on the former one had sent a request to him by an Indian half-breed, to meet her in a little grove some hundred yards distant from the walls of the fortress.

At first the captain had refused to go unattended, for fear of some stratagem to take his life or make him a prisoner. The messenger had gone back evidently dissatisfied; but in a few minutes he had returned with a skin parchment, on which the same request, as orally delivered, had been written with a charred stick, with the additional statement that the writer was a female, and that the news she had to convey was of great importance.

Ashamed to show further cowardice, the captain had armed himself to the teeth, had called his garrison around him, and notified them to be in readiness to protect the fort if besieged, and avenge him on the half-breed, whom he left with them as hostage, in case he should not return within two hours—merely stating, by way of explanation, that he was going to hold a private conference with a distinguished chief.

The result of this conference, as before stated, had been to save the lives of all, and defeat a well-laid scheme of the savages.

Captain Balcolm furthermore stated, that Prairie Flower, as she called herself, spoke the English language well and fluently; and that to his inquiry regarding herself and tribe, she had answered, with a smile, that she must ever remain a mysterious being to him and all of his race; that as to tribe, she found herself a welcome guest with all—came and went as she chose, without question or hindrance—and that the language of each she understood and spoke as readily as her mother tongue.

“In conclusion,” added the gallant captain, “I must

say, that, with all my experience, I have never seen so perfect, so mysterious, so incomprehensible a being as herself. Were I superstitious, I should unquestionably be tempted to doubt my senses, and believe her a supernatural visitant ; but I have touched her, and *I know* that she is flesh and blood."

Many there were in the fort, however, who had not so much faith in her identity with an earthly habitant as the captain ; and I often heard confidential whispers to the effect that she was a being from another realm, who had assumed the mortal shape for the time, merely to bring about some special design of the Great Spirit, and that when said design should be accomplished she would never be seen again by living mortal.

The Indian, it is well known to all who know anything of his history, is the most superstitious creature on earth, and believes in the direct interposition of spirits, in bodily shape or otherwise, on any and every momentous occasion ; and as the trapper or hunter is but little removed from him by civilization, and not a whit by knowledge gained from letters, it is hardly reasonable to suppose that he would imbibe ideas at war with those among whom the most of his eventful life is spent. In his earliest venture, he learns and adopts the habits of his enemy, and in some cases it would seem his very nature also ; and the result is, that he becomes at last neither more nor less than what I may venture to term a civilized savage.

And here I may remark, *en passant*, that your real, *bona fide* mountaineer rarely looks beyond the lodge of some favorite tribe for a partner to share his toils and rear his progeny ; and to the truth of this assertion, even the garrison of Fort Laramie bore striking evidence ; for nearly every wife among them was a full-blooded squaw, and nearly every child bore the cross of the red man and white.

Various were the speculations that night concerning Prairie Flower and her alarming intelligence, the truthfulness of which none seemed to question, however much they might the identity of the lovely being herself with the race called mortal.

That the Indians were at Bitter Cottonwood in great force, was therefore a matter beyond dispute ; and the question was, what should be done under the circumstances? To remain inactive was only to play the part of cowards, doom a portion of their own race to certain destruction, augment the confidence of the wily foe in his own resources, and consequently raise his hopes with the flush of success, and so increase his daring and audacity. While, on the other hand, to assail him in all his strength, in his own stronghold, with only a handful of men, was like rushing unarmed into the lion's den and courting speedy annihilation.

In this dilemma what was to be done? Something, all admitted, must be done, and that quickly ; but what that something was, now became a matter for serious deliberation. Some proposed one thing and some another; and the discussion waxed warm, and seemed likely to be protracted indefinitely, without resulting in the agreement of any two to the proposal of any other two, when Kit Carson, who had sat and listened attentively, without venturing a remark, observed :

"Say what you will, comrades, thar is after all but one way of settling this affair, and that is to pitch into the varmints and lift their hair. I've had a little experience in my time, if I am young in years, and may safely say I've never knowed an Injun yet as wouldn't back when assailed in an 'arnest manner by a determined pale-face. I've rode right among thar lodges before now, and raised a top-knot in full view of fifty able-bodied warriors, their squaws and pappooses. Now if I could do this here myself, it speaks well for an attack upon them in numbers."

"But what, then, do you propose?" I inquired.

"Why, sir, to arm and mount, on good horses, a dozen or fifteen of us, dash into thar midst, and fight our way out."

As he said this, his brow wrinkled, his eyes flashed, and his whole countenance exhibited traces of that fiery, reckless daring, which, together with its opposite, coolness and great presence of mind, had already rendered him so famous in the wilderness. I saw at once, that,

however mild and quiet he might appear when not excited, it only needed an occasion like the present to bring out his latent energies and make him a terrible foe to contend with.

"Well," I rejoined, "although I came merely for adventure, and beyond that have no object in pursuing my way further, yet I will readily volunteer my services in a case of such emergency."

"And I," exclaimed Huntly, quickly.

"Your hands, gentlemen!" said Carson. "I took you for *men*, and I see I warn't mistaken. Who next?"

This rapid decision produced an electrical effect upon all, and in a moment a dozen affirmative answers responded to the challenge; while each, eager to get ahead of his neighbor, now pressed around the young, famous and daring mountaineer.

In less than half an hour all preliminaries were settled, and sixteen hardy, able-bodied men were mustered into the ranks. These included the four trappers who had been our companions, together with Huntly, Teddy and myself.

It was then agreed that Kit Carson should be our leader, and that on the following day we should mount ourselves on the best horses that could be procured, and, taking a roundabout course, should approach the savages as near as possible without being discovered, and await the night to commence our attack.

This matter thus being finally settled, we retired to rest, some of us for the last time before taking that final sleep which knows no waking.

Rolling myself in a buffalo skin, I threw myself upon the ground—but it was a long time before I could close my eyes in slumber. Thoughts of what another night might bring forth kept me awake. I might be lying cold and dead upon the earth, a prey to wild beasts—or, what was more terrifying, be a living captive to a merciless foe, doomed to the awful tortures of the stake. I thought too of home—of Lilian—of the mysterious Prairie Flower—and in the confusion of all these I fell asleep, to find them strangely commingled in my dreams.

The morning broke bright and beautiful; and ere the

sun had more than gilded the loftiest peak of the Rocky Mountains, we were all astir, preparing for our hazardous expedition.

With the assistance of Captain Balcolm, we succeeded in mustering sixteen fine horses, including of course those we had brought with us. We then armed ourselves to the teeth, with rifles, pistols, knives and tomahawks; and, partaking of a savory breakfast, tendered us by the gallant commander of the garrison, prepared ourselves to sally forth.

Before we departed, however, I had a task, which proved far more amusing than desirable, in explaining to Teddy the proper method of using his rifle and pistols, and the manner in which he must conduct himself in the forthcoming fight. Having shown him how to load, prime and sight the former weapon, I discharged it at a target, and ordered him to imitate my example with all the dispatch possible.

"Jabers!" shouted Teddy, in great glee, scampering off to the target to make an examination of my shot.

In a minute he returned, bringing it with him; and pointing triumphantly to a bullet-hole, which he found in its center, he said:

"Troth, your honor, but thim same shooters is beauthifful things, now, for murthering the baastly blaggards of Injins, jist! Here, now, yees boured a howle right cintral, as asy as meself could do it wid a gimlet, and yees a standing there all the whiles! Be me sowl too! an' now I remimbers, I didn't sae the ball at all, at all, though I looked mighty sharp at it all the time wid my two eyes. Murtheration! but Amirica is a great counthry now, barring the thaving baasts of savages that's in it."

Something like an hour was spent in making Teddy familiar with the rifle; at the end of which time I had the satisfaction of finding him fit for duty.

We all now mounted and put ourselves under the leadership of Kit Carson, and, amid three hearty cheers from the regular garrison (most of whom remained to protect the station), and earnest prayers from all for our safety and success in the coming contest, we dashed out from the fort.

Shaping our course along the bank of the river, we advanced some ten or fifteen miles over the regular Oregon route, when we came to a place called Big Spring, which takes its name from a large spring of water gushing out at the base of a steep hill, some quarter of a mile below the traveled road.

Here we halted and held a council of war regarding our further progress ; which resulted in the decision to quit the road at this point, and, by striking off to the left, keeping ourselves covered as much as possible in the wood, endeavor to gain a safe lodgment near the Indian camp, and remain quiet till after night-fall, when we must be guided wholly by circumstances. It was also thought prudent to throw out a few scouts in advance, lest we unknowingly might enter an ambuscade and all be cut off.

For this purpose Carson dismounted to act on foot. He appointed me his lieutenant, and gave me private instructions regarding the route, and at what point, provided he had not joined us meantime, I was to halt and await him. Then ordering two Canadian-French *voyageurs* to dismount also, he said a few words to them in a jargon I did not understand. In another moment all three had separated and were buried in the surrounding wood at so many different points of compass.

Leading the unriden horses of the scouts, we slowly picked our way over rough and sometimes dangerous ground, keeping a sharp look-out on every side for fear of surprise, until the sun had reached within an hour and a half of the horizon, when we came to a beautiful little open plat, covered with rich green grass and blooming with flowers, in the center of which bubbled up a cool, crystal spring, forming a sparkling little rivulet, and the whole of which was surrounded by a dense thicket, not more than a hundred yards distant at any point.

This beautiful spot to me seemed the oasis of the desert ; and being to the best of my judgment the one described by Kit, where I was to await him, I accordingly ordered a halt.

Dismounting and refreshing ourselves at the spring,

we watered our animals, and allowed them to graze around us, holding fast to the bridle-reins the while, prepared to remount at a moment's notice or the first sign of danger.

Half an hour passed in this way, and some of the mountaineers were becoming impatient, when, to our great delight, we beheld the welcome visage of Carson, as he glided noiselessly into the open plat and rejoined us. And, singular enough, almost at the same moment the two *voyageurs* made their appearance at different points, not one of the three having seen either of the others since their parting from us in the morning.

"Well, boys," said Carson, "thar'll have to be some warm doings to a certainty; and those of you who aren't prepared to lose your scalps, had better be backing out or getting ready as soon as convenient."

"Have you seen the Indians?" asked Huntly.

"Well, I have, and know Prairie Flower didn't lie either. Thar ar three distinct parties of them—composed of Sioux, Cheyennes and Blackfeet—at least, to the best of my judgment, for I didn't like venturing too close. They ar camped in a little hollow just below Bitter Cottonwood, not more'n three miles distant, and evidently have no suspicion of our being near them."

"Well, what is now to be done?" I asked.

"Wait till I've had a talk with these Canadians."

With this Kit called the scouts aside, and, after a few minutes' conversation, returned to me and said:

"La Fanche and Grenois both report that they've seen no Injun signs to alarm; from which I argue, that, thinking themselves secure where they ar, the savages haven't taken thar usual precaution to send out scouts. Regarding the plan of attack, I think we'd better let our horses feed here till dark, and then ride through the forest for a couple of miles or so, conceal them, and take it afoot. I've got the plan fixed in my head, and will tell you more then. And now let's feed and smoke while we've got time."

We had provided ourselves with a good supply of jerked meat, and we accordingly proceeded to satisfy the demands of nature. This done, we lighted our pipes

and smoked and talked till the shades of night warned us to be again on the move.

Guided by Kit, we now entered the thicket and advanced slowly, cautiously and silently, for the better part of an hour, when we came to a dense cover of cottonwood.

"Halt and rope!" said Kit, in a low tone.

In a moment each man was on the ground, and engaged in attaching his horse securely to a tree, though so dark was it here that everything had to be done by the sense of touch.

"See that all your arms ar about you, and ready, and then follow me, Injun file!" said Carson again; and in less than three minutes, with stealthy tread, sixteen determined men, one after another, glided from the thicket into an open wood, like so many specters stalking from the tombs of the dead.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TERRIBLE AMBUSCADE.



OME three-fourths of a mile brought us to the brow of a hill, whence we could overlook the stronghold of the enemy.

Immediately below us were several lodges made of skins, around which we could faintly perceive numerous dark figures, moving to and fro, and evidently, as we thought, preparing to turn in for the night. A little beyond this was another encampment, or cluster of lodges, and still beyond another—the three taken together numbering not less than a hundred and fifty or two hundred warriors.

And here stood we, a little band of sixteen men, about to assail, at the least calculation, ten times our

own force. What rashness ! what a fool-hardy undertaking !

"Charles," whispered I to my friend, "it is well that you and I are single men."

"Why so, Frank?"

"Because neither wife nor child will be left to mourn our loss."

"That is true," answered he, with a sigh. "But do you then think our doom certain?"

"If we attack I do ; or, at least, that we have ten chances against us to one in our favor."

"It won't do," whispered Carson at this moment, retreating a few paces and motioning us to follow him. Then he added, in a low tone : "We're too soon, and it will never do to try it afoot. I must stick to my first calculation. Our only chance of escape from certain death must be by our horses. We'll return to them and await the mid-watch of night. Then we must dash among them, do the best we can, and break for cover, or we shall be rubbed out before we know it. I thought, when I reconnoitered, it would do better to steal in among them and work silently—but I see now our only hope is by dash."

Accordingly we retraced our steps, and, having gained the cover where our animals were concealed, squatted down upon the earth.

"I say, Kit," observed Black George, as he lighted his pipe, "what d'ye think o' that thar Injin gal, hey?"

"Think she's a mysterious one."

"Ever seed her afore?"

"Never."

"I have—augh ! Think she's a speret, hey?"

"No ! think she's a human."

"Well, I'll be dog-gone ef I do ! I jest believe she's got wings and kin fly—ef I don't, call me han'some and put me among the cotton plants—augh !"

"Faith, thin, Mистер Black George, yees and mesilf is thinking much alike now," interposed Teddy. "I thought all the whiles she was a bir-r-d, barring the feathers, which is all beads on her."

"Wagh ! put out for a greenhorn now !" returned

the old trapper, sarcastically. "She's no bir-rer-rerd, as you sez. She's a angel, she is—ef she isn't, heyars what don't know fat cow from poor bull!"

Talking of Prairie Flower, our present design, together with various other matters, we whiled away some two or three hours, when Carson notified us it was time to be on the move.

Mounting once more, we set forward, and, bearing to the left, descended immediately into the valley, in which the foe was encamped, instead of keeping along the brow of the ridge as before. We were now compelled to use the utmost caution, as the least sound might betray us and thwart our plans.

At length we again made a halt, in full view of the dark lodges, which were faintly perceptible in the dim light of the stars and one or two smouldering fires near the center of the encampment. All was still as the grave, and, from anything we could discover to the contrary, as devoid of a living thing. Not a word, not even a whisper, was heard from one of our party. Each sat erect upon his horse, motionless as a statue, his eyes fixed upon some object before him, and his mind, it may be, upon death and the great hereafter.

At least so was mine; and though I rarely knew fear, yet, from some unaccountable cause, I now felt my heart die within me, as if some dreadful thing were about to befall me. Our pause was but momentary, but in that short space of time I seemed to live an age.

"Forward!" whispered Carson, solemnly. "Each man for himself, and God for us all!"

Scarcely had the sentence passed his lips, when, to our astonishment and dismay, a tremendous volley rang on all sides of us, and a shower of bullets and arrows came whizzing through the air, accompanied by yells that made my blood run cold; while on every hand we beheld a legion of dark figures suddenly spring up from the earth, their murderous knives and tomahawks faintly gleaming in the dim light, as, flourishing them over their heads, and yelling their appalling war-whoops, they bore down upon us in overwhelming numbers. To add to our consternation, we heard the thundering tramp of a

body of horse, in front and rear, rushing up to join our enemies and hem us in completely.

Instead of surprising the enemy, as expected, we now found ourselves surprised in turn, and in the center of a terrible ambushade, from which there seemed to be no chance for escape. Our design had doubtless been betrayed; but by whom I had no time for conjecture; for what between the yells of the savages and the groans and curses from our own little band, many of whom were wounded and some seriously, the rearing and plunging of the horses, and my desire to do the best I could for myself and friends, I had no time for speculation. Two of the enemy's balls had passed through my hat, one of them within an inch of my skull, and another through the sleeves of my frock, slightly grazing my arm, but fortunately without injury to myself or horse.

"Riddle them and tear out thar hearts!" shouted Carson, in a voice that rose distinctly above the din of conflict; and, wheeling his charger, he dashed into the thickest of the fray, with that utter disregard to personal safety which Napoleon displayed at the far-famed bridge of Lodi.

Determined to share the fate of Kit, whatever it might be, I called to Huntly to join me, and rushed my horse alongside of his.

Now it was that I had an opportunity of witnessing that coolness and intrepidity, those almost superhuman resources and exertions, which had rendered the name of Kit Carson so famous.

On every hand we were hemmed in, and every man among us was fighting valiantly for his own life and vengeance. There was no opportunity for cowardice; no chance for flight; retreat was cut off; we must fight or die. All seemed to understand this, and used superhuman exertions to overcome the foe.

On all sides resounded hideous yells, and curses, and groans, and shouts, mingled with the reports of fire-arms and the clash of deadly weapons.

Above the tumult and din I could now distinguish

the voices of Carson, the trappers and Teddy, showing that each was doing his duty.

"Down, old paint-face !" cried one.

"Take that and keep them company as has gone under afore ye !" shouted another.

"No place here for sich imps as you !" roared a third.

"To the divil wid ye now, ye bloody spalpeens, for attacking honest, dacent white paples—ye murthering thaves of Sathan, yees !" yelled the excited Irishman, as, in all the glory of making a shillalah of his rifle, he laid about him right worthily.

At this moment, when, in spite of the terrible odds against us, victory was almost ours, up thundered some thirty horsemen to reinforce our foes, revive their courage, and render our case terribly desperate, if not hopeless.

"At 'em, boys !" shouted Carson, apparently not the least disheartened ; and, driving his spurs into his horse, dropping his bridle-rein upon the saddle-bow, hurling his already broken and useless rifle at the heads of the nearest Indians, and drawing his knife and tomahawk, he charged upon the new-comers, seemingly with as much confidence in his success as if backed by a whole battalion.

No wonder Kit Carson was famous, for he seemed to be a whole army in himself.

Side by side with Huntly I fought, with the desperation of a madman, and performed feats which astonished even myself. Thrice did I find my bridle-rein seized, and thought that all was over ; but each time, by some inexplicable means, my path was cleared, and I still remained unharmed.

For ten minutes did the fierce contest continue, during which time many of our foes had been killed or disabled, and six of our own gallant band had gone from among the living.

Still the savages pressed around us, and I now found my situation growing more and more desperate.

From over-exertion I began to feel weak ; and my gallant steed, having been less fortunate than I, was

already staggering under his wounds. A few more painful efforts to bear down upon his foes, and he reeled, dropped upon his knees, tried to recover, failed, and at last rolled over upon his side and expired.

As he went down I leaped from his back and instantly found myself surrounded by savages.

Striking right and left, I shouted to Huntly, and in a moment he charged to my rescue.

By our united exertions we managed for a moment or two to maintain our ground.

But the strength of both of us was failing rapidly, and I now found myself bleeding from numerous wounds.

A few stabs and a musket shot killed the horse of my friend, who was by this means brought to the same desperate strait as myself.

"It is all over, Frank!" he groaned, as a blow on the head staggered him back against me.

"Never say die!" I shouted, as with my remaining strength I sprung forward and struck down his assailant.

A blow on the back of my neck now brought me to my knees. With a great effort I staggered to my feet, only to see my friend struck down and be felled senseless to the earth myself.

CHAPTER XV.

A STRANGE AWAKENING.



WHEN consciousness was again restored, I found myself lying on a pallet of skins, in a small, rude cabin, curiously constructed of sticks, leaves, earth, and a few hides of buffalo.

The first sensation was one of painful confusion. I felt much as one does on awaking from a troubled dream, without being able to recall a single

event connected with it, and yet feeling the effects of all combined. I was aware that either something terrible had happened, or I had dreamed it ; but what that something was, I had not the remotest idea. The most I could bring to mind was a painful sensation of death. Perhaps I was dead? Horrible thought ! I tried to rise, but could not—could only barely lift my head from its rude pillow. By great exertion I raised one hand a little—but the effort exhausted all my strength, and it fell back heavily, causing me the most excruciating pain.

What did all this mean ? Surely I was not dead !—for dead people, I thought to myself, feel no suffering. But where was I ? and how came I here ? and what was my ailment ? And then—strange thought—*who* was I ? Laugh if you will, reader—but I had actually forgotten my own name, and for a moment could not recall a single event of my existence. I had a confused idea of having lived before—of having been somebody—of having experienced sensations both of pleasure and pain ; but, beyond these, all was blank and dark as a rayless night.

Suddenly one remembrance after another began to flash upon me. My first youth—my school-boy days—my collegiate course ; and then, the train once fired, years and events were passed with the velocity of thought itself ; and, in one brief moment, everything, up to the time of my fall in the fight, rose fresh in my memory.

But still the mystery was as dark as ever, and my curiosity as much unsatisfied. How had the battle gone ? Were my friends the victors ? But no, impossible, or I should not be here. Had they all been killed or taken prisoners ?

And Huntly—my friend ! Great Heaven ! the very thought of him made me shudder with dread. Alas ! he was dead. I knew it—I felt it. I had seen him fall, and of course he could not have escaped. Poor, poor Charles Huntly—my bosom companion—friend of my happier days ! The very thought of his untimely fate, cut off in the prime of life, made me groan with anguish.

But where was I? and how came I here? Why had I been saved and not my friend? But it might be that he was dead; while I, by showing signs of life, had been brought hither and restored to consciousness, only to be the victim of some oblation of thanksgiving to the imaginary deity who had vouchsafed the victory to my foes.

Ay, this was the true, but horrible, solution of the mystery! My friends were dead—my foes had triumphed—and for this (horrible thought!) I was about to be the victim for a heathen shrine.

Was I alone? I listened, but could hear no sound indicating the presence of another. Not satisfied with this, I turned my head slightly; and in the center of the lodge, squatted on the ground, over a small fire, with a long pipe in his mouth, I beheld a little, old, dried-up man, whom, but for now and then a slight motion, I might have taken for a heap of clay, or an Egyptian mummy—so much did the skins, worn around his body, and his own shriveled and livid flesh, resemble either.

Drawing in the smoke a couple of times, and puffing it out to the right and left, he arose and shuffled toward me.

Curious to learn the object of such a visit, I thought it best to feign unconsciousness. Accordingly, shutting my eyes, but not so as to prevent my seeing him, I lay and watched his motions.

He was a miserable and loathsome-looking being, the very sight of whom was offensive to me, particularly as I fancied him my surgeon and jailer, who would heal my wounds only to pass me over to the executioner. In height he could not have exceeded five feet, even in his palmyest days, and this was now much reduced by age and debility. He was thin and skinny, and his small, puckered-up visage bore the complicated autograph of a century. His head was bald, save a few white hairs on the crown, where had once been his scalp lock; his nose and chin almost met over his toothless gums; and, to complete, his trembling limbs and tottering frame exhibited a striking resemblance to the bony picture of death. Only one feature about him gave evidence of his

being more than a mere walking automaton; and that was his keen, eagle eye; whose luster, apparently undimmed by years, still flashed forth the unconsumed fires of what had once been a mighty soul, either for good or evil.

As he approached, he fastened his sharp eyes upon me with such intensity that involuntarily I let mine drop to the ground. When I raised them again, I found him occupied with some mysterious ceremony, probably an incantation to appease the wrath or adjure the aid of some imaginary spirit.

Taking his pipe from his mouth, he blew a volume of smoke in a certain direction, toward which he pointed the stem of his pipe. This was done to the four cardinal points of compass; and then a volume was blown upward and another downward; after which he bent over me and went through a series of mysterious signs. Then taking one of my hands in his, he felt my pulse, during which operation I could see his face brighten with an expression of internal satisfaction. Then his bony fingers were pressed upon my forehead and temples, and a single "Onhchi!" which I interpreted from his manner to mean "Good!" escaped through his livid lips.

Thinking longer deception unnecessary, I opened wide my eyes and said:

"Who are you?"

"Cha-cha-chee-kee-ho-bah," was the answer.

Then, straightening himself as much as age would permit, he placed his pipe again in his mouth, and, turning his face toward the door of the hut, struck the palms of his hand three times together, uttering, in a cracked voice, the two words:

"Leni Leoti!"

Wondering what all this meant, I turned my eyes in the same direction; and the next moment, to my astonishment, I beheld the beautiful form of the mysterious Prairie Flower enter from without.

With a light, quick step, her face flushed with animation and joy, she glided up to the decrepit old Indian, and, in a silvery voice, such as one might expect from so

lovely a creature, said a few words in a language I did not understand.

Then, springing to me, she kneeled at my side, and, turning her eyes upward, her sweet lips seemed moving to an earnest prayer from a guileless heart.

I no longer had any fears for my safety—for in such a presence, and with such an act of devotion, I knew myself safe. I was only afraid to speak or move, lest I should wake to find it all a delusive dream.

But my desire to be assured of its reality would not long let me remain silent, and at last I said :

“Sweet being, tell me the meaning of all I see?”

“Friend, you must not talk,” she replied, in good English ; “it will do you harm.”

“Nevertheless, fair creature, you must answer my question! My curiosity is wonderfully excited, and silence will harm me more than conversation.”

She turned and addressed a few words to the old man, who now approached her side and gazed down upon me with a mild look.

His reply was apparently satisfactory ; for, looking full upon me again, she said :

“You may be right, and I will answer. You were badly wounded in the fight.”

“I am aware of that.”

“You were left upon the ground for dead.”

“Ha ! indeed ! But the battle—who won ?”

“Your friends were victorious.”

“Surprising ! What lucky chance of fortune gave them the victory ?”

“A reinforcement.”

“Indeed ! from where ?”

“Fort John.”

This fort, now demolished, stood, at the time of which I write, about a mile below Fort Laramie, and was well garrisoned. From a mistaken confidence in our own abilities to win the day, we had neglected calling there for volunteers to augment our numbers and render our success more certain.

“And what brought them to our aid so opportunely ?” I inquired.

"Certain timely information."

"By whom conveyed?"

"A friend to your race."

"By the same messenger that brought intelligence of the enemy to Fort Laramie? by your own dear self?"

"It matters not by whom. Let the result suffice."

"How shall I thank you, sweet Prairie Flower?"

"For what?"

"For all that you have done."

"I need no thanks."

"But I must be permitted to show my gratitude."

"Then do it by your silence."

"I will; and by my prayers for your safety and happiness."

"Bless you!" she exclaimed, fervently. "The only boon I would have asked, save one."

"And what is that?"

"That you will not seek to know more of me and my history than I may choose to tell; and that whatever you may see and hear that may seem mysterious, you will reveal to no one without my permission."

"To please sweet Prairie Flower," I answered, "I will do as she requests; though she must bear in mind that where so much interest is excited, the task imposed is not an easy one,"

"Then by adhering to it you will confer upon her the deeper obligation."

"Yet I cannot forbear one question."

"Well!"

"Is Prairie Flower not of my race?"

"The judgment of the querist must answer him."

"Will not you?"

"Not now—perhaps never."

"I regret your decision, yet will not press the point. But to return to the battle."

"What would you know?"

"How it was won—how I came to be neglected—and why I am here!"

"A reinforcement, charging suddenly upon the enemy, alarmed and put him to rout. The victors pressed upon his rear, and left their killed and wounded

upon the gory field. Before they returned, a few who beheld, but did not join in the fight, found you and another, in whom life was not yet extinct, and bore you both away."

"And—and—that other?" I gasped. "Was—was it—my friend?"

"It was."

"And he—he—is—alive?"

"Ay, and doing well."

"Thank God! thank God! A weight of grief is lifted from my heart. But where—oh, tell me quickly—where is he now?"

"Not far from here."

"And all is owing to you?"

"Nay, I said not that."

"God bless you for an angel of mercy! I must thank you—my heart is bursting with gratitude!"

"Nay, spare your thanks to mortal! Thank God—not me—for I am only an humble instrument in His hands."

"Mysterious being, who are you?"

"Remember your promise, and question not."

"You seem more of Heaven than earth."

"It is only seeming then. But I must remind you that you have now talked full long."

"Nay, but tell me where I am?"

"In the lodge of Cha-cha-chee-kee-ho-bah, or Old-Man-of-the-Mountains."

"Is it he that stands beside you?"

"The same. He is 'Great Medicine,' and has cured you."

"And how long have I been here?"

"Four days."

"Good heavens! you astonish me! Surely not four days?"

"Prairie Flower would not tell you what is not true," said my informant, with a reproachful look.

"I know it, sweet being; I do not doubt you; I only intended to express surprise. Then I have been four days unconscious?"

"Ay, a week."

"A week?" I exclaimed, looking her earnestly in the face. "A week, say you? And was the battle fought a week ago?"

"It was—a week ago last night."

"And pray in what part of the country am I now?"

"On the Black Hills."

"Indeed! And how far from Fort Laramie?"

"Not less than sixty miles."

"And how was I borne hither?"

"On a litter."

"By whom?"

"My friends."

"White men or red?"

"The latter."

"And for what purpose?"

"To restore you to health."

"And what object could you or they have in bestowing such kindness on strangers?"

"To do good."

"For which, of course, you expect a recompense?"

Prairie Flower looked at me earnestly a moment, with a sweet, sad, reproachful expression, and then said, with a sigh:

"Like the rest of the world you misconstrue our motives."

"Forgive me!" I exclaimed, almost passionately—for her appearance and words touched my very soul: "forgive me, sweet being! I was wrong, I see. On your part it was solely charity that prompted this noble act. But it is so rare that even a good action is done in this world without a selfish motive, that, in the thoughtlessness of the moment, I even imputed the latter to you."

"Perhaps that is why so few understand us!" she said, sadly.

"You must be a very singular people," I rejoined, looking her full in the eye. "Will you not tell me the name of your tribe?"

She shook her head.

"I told you before," she answered, "you must not question me touching my history or tribe. Let it suffice

that we are known as the Mysterious or Great Medicine Nation ; that to us all roads are free, and with us all nations are at peace. We war upon none and none upon us."

"And yet do you not excite others to deeds you seem to abhor?"

"What mean you?" she asked, quickly, a flush of surprise giving a beautiful glow to her noble features.

"Forgive me if I speak too plainly! But was not your message to Fort Laramie the cause of a bloody battle between the whites and Indians at Bitter Cottonwood?"

"The immediate cause of warrior meeting warrior in the game of death, most undoubtedly," she answered, with a proud look and sparkling eyes. "But do you not overlook the fact that it was done to save the innocent and defenseless? Were not the Indians gathered there in mighty force to prey upon the weak? and was it not the duty of those who sought to do right to warn the few against the many?—the unwary of their hidden foe? Could Prairie Flower stand idly by and see defenseless women and children drawn into a fatal snare, and made a bloody sacrifice to a heartless enemy? Had the pale-face so laid in wait for the red man, Prairie Flower, if in her power, would so have warned the latter. Prairie Flower did not call the red man there; she regretted to see him there; but, being there, she could do no less than warn and put the pale-face on his guard."

This was said with such a proud look of conscious rectitude—an expression so sublime, and an eloquence so pathetic—that I could hardly realize I was gazing upon and listening to an earthly habitant. I felt ashamed of my ungallant and unjust insinuation, and hastened to reply:

"Forgive me, sweet Prairie Flower, for having again wronged you! for having again done you injustice! But, as before, I overlooked the motive in the act. I will strive not to offend again and wound your sensitive feelings by doubting your generous intentions. Are there many more like you, sweet Prairie Flower?"

"Our tribe numbers between sixty and seventy souls."

"Is this your fixed abiding place?"

"Only for a time. Our home is everywhere between the rising and the setting sun. We go wherever we think ourselves the most beneficial in effecting good."

"Perhaps you are Christian missionaries?"

"We believe in the holy religion of Jesus Christ, and endeavor to inculcate its doctrines."

"Why then did this old man use mysterious signs?"

"He is of another race and generation, was once a Great Medicine in his tribe, and cannot divest himself of old habits."

"You seem rightly named the Mysterious Tribe; and of you in particular I have heard before."

"Indeed! When and how?"

I proceeded to detail briefly the story of the old trapper.

She mused a moment and replied:

"I remember such a person now, methinks. He was found, as you say, with life nearly extinct. By careful nursing he was restored to health. But he seemed inquisitive, and I employed the ruse of telling him his life was in danger, to hurry his departure, lest he might prove troublesome. I trust there was nothing wrong in that. But come, come—I have forgotten my own caution and talked too long by far. You need repose and silence."

"But one thing more! My friend?"

"You shall see him soon—perhaps to-morrow."

"Oh, no! say to-day!"

"I cannot. To-morrow is the earliest. And so adieu! Seek repose and forgetfulness in sleep."

With this she turned, and glided out of the apartment in the same noiseless manner she had entered it.

The old man looked at me a moment, shook his head and trembling hands, turned, shuffled away to his fire, and I was left alone to reflect on what I had seen and heard and my present condition.

CHAPTER XVI.

ANOTHER INTERVIEW WITH PRAIRIE FLOWER.



It is a painful thing to one who has never known sickness, to be confined day after day to his bed, racked with torture, debarred even the liberty of enjoying for a moment the bright sunshine and clear air of heaven, unable perhaps to lift his head from his pillow, and yet beholding others, flushed with health and happiness, coming and going as they please, and seeming to prize lightly all that he most covets.

It is only on a bed of sickness and pain that we are taught to value as we should that greatest of all blessings, good health—a blessing without which all others are robbed of their pleasures; for what are fortune and friends, and all their concomitants, to one that is borne down by a weight of bodily suffering? True, these may, in a measure, minister to his comforts—for without money and friends, the sick bed is only a pallet of the most abject misery—yet all the joys arising therefrom in connection with health, are lost to the invalid; and he lays, and sighs, and groans, and envies the veriest strolling mendicant on earth the enjoyment of his strength and liberty.

Such were my thoughts, as, hour after hour, from the disappearance of Prairie Flower, I lay and mused upon all the events of my checkered life up to that present time.

Born to wealth, blessed with health, kind friends, and a college education, I might have passed my whole life in luxurious ease, but for the restless desire for travel and adventure. Not a discomfort had I ever known ere my departure from the paternal roof; and when I remembered that now I was thousands of miles away, in an Indian camp of the wilderness, wounded nigh unto death, unable to rise from my pallet, solely dependent upon

strangers of a savage race for my existence and the few favors I received, perhaps rendered a cripple or an invalid for life—and reflected withal on how much I had sacrificed for this—my feelings may be better imagined than described.

To what extent I was wounded I knew not, for I had neglected to question Prairie Flower on the subject, and I was now too weak to make the examination myself. My head, one of my arms, and both of my lower limbs, were bandaged in a rude way, and my weakness had doubtless been caused by excessive hemorrhage. From the manner of Prairie Flower and the old Indian, I was led to infer that the crisis of danger was past ; but how long it would take me to recover I had no means of ascertaining, nor whether I should be again blessed with the use of my limbs. Perhaps I might here be confined for months, and then only regain my wonted strength to find myself a cripple for life.

These thoughts pained and alarmed me, and I looked eagerly for the return of Prairie Flower, to gain the desired information. But she came not ; and through sheer exhaustion I was at last forced to drop the subject ; while I strove to resign myself to such fate as He, who had preserved my existence as it were by a miracle, should in His wise dispensation see proper to decree.

Then my thoughts turned upon Prairie Flower. What mystery was shrouding this singular and angelic being, that she feared to be questioned regarding her history and tribe ? Was she of the Indian race ? I could not believe it. She seemed too fair and lovely, and without the lineaments which distinguish this people from those nations entitled to the name of pale-face. Might she not be a missionary, who, blessed with great self-denial and a desire to render herself useful while on earth, and yet too modest to avow it, had, at a tender age, gone boldly among the savages and labored zealously in her noble calling, to enlighten their dark minds and teach them the sacred truths of Christianity ? She had admitted that all believed in the doctrines preached by the Saviour ; and though she had not openly acknowledged, she certainly had not denied, my imputation

regarding the calling of herself and friends. This, then, was the best solution of the mystery I could invent.

But even admitting this to be true—that she was in reality of the Anglo-Saxon race, and a pious instructor who found her enjoyments in what to others would have been a source of misery—still it was a matter for curious research, how one of her age should have become so familiar with the language and habits of all the various tribes of the Far West; and why, if she had friends, she had been permitted to venture among them alone and at the risk of her life.

View the matter as I would, I found it ever shrouded with a veil of mystery and romance, beyond which all my speculations were unable to penetrate.

Thus I lay and pondered for several hours, during which time I saw not a living soul, the old Indian excepted—who, having finished his pipe, sat doubled up on the ground by his smouldering fire, as motionless and apparently as inanimate as so much lead. Once, and only once, he raised his head, peered curiously around him for a moment, and then settled down into the previous position.

Fixing my gaze upon him, and wondering what secrets of the past and his own eventful life might perchance be locked in his aged breast, I at last felt my eyes grow heavy, the old man grew less and less distinct, seeming to nod and swim before my vision, sometimes single and sometimes double, and then all became confused and I went off into a gentle sleep.

How long I slept I am unable to say; but an acute sense of pain awoke me; when, to my surprise, I found it already dark, and the old man bending over me, engaged in dressing my wounds, and applying a kind of whitish liniment of a soothing and healing nature, prepared by himself and kept on hand for such and similar purposes.

Some half an hour was he occupied in this proceeding, during which I suffered more or less pain from the removal of the bandages; which, having become dry and stiff, adhered rather too closely to the affected parts.

Thinking it useless to question him, I made no

remark, but passively suffered him to do as he pleased ; which he did, without appearing to notice me any more than if I were dead and he performing the last office of sepulture.

At length, the bandages being replaced, and my condition rendered as comfortable as circumstances would permit, he tendered me some light food and water, of which I partook sparingly ; and then, with the single word, "Onhchi," and a nod of his head, he turned away, and left me to my meditations. In ten minutes I was again asleep.

When I next awoke, the sun was streaming through the open doorway and crevices of the old cabin ; and, to my surprise, I found Prairie Flower again kneeling by my side. Her eyes were turned upward, as before, and her lips moved, but not a sound issued from them. She was evidently making a silent appeal to Heaven in my behalf ; and as I lay and gazed upon her sweet, placid countenance, and felt that all this was for me, I thought I had never beheld a being so lovely ; and she seemed rather an immortal seraph, bent at the Throne of Grace, than a mortal tenant of this mundane sphere.

At length she arose, with a charming smile upon her features, and, in the sweetest tones imaginable, said :

"And how fare you this morning, my friend?"

"I feel much refreshed," I answered, "by a night of calm repose, and my strength is evidently improving."

"I am glad to hear it, for you have been nigh unto death."

"I am aware of it, and know not how to express to you my deep obligations for my recovery."

"As I told you before, no thanks are due me. I did but my duty, and my own conscience has already rewarded me tenfold. Those who labor to effect all the good they can, need no thanks expressed in words, for words are superfluous."

"And yet had I done for you what you have done for me, would you not have thanked me?"

"Doubtless I should."

"And will you not allow me the privilege you would

have claimed yourself? Would it have pleased you to find me ungrateful?"

"I cannot say it would," she replied, musingly; "for, like others, I am only mortal; and perhaps vain, too vain, of having what little I do appreciated. I should not have such feelings, I am well aware; but they are engrafted in my nature, and I cannot help it."

"Then even oral thanks cannot be displeasing to sweet Prairie Flower?"

"Understand me, friend! There is a vast difference between expressing thanks and being ungrateful. That you are not ungrateful, your look and actions tell—therefore are words superfluous."

"Well, then, I will say no more—but trust that time will give me an opportunity of proving by *acts* what at best could be but feebly spoken. I agree with you, that words in a case like mine are of little importance. They are in fact 'trifles light as air,' and as often proceed from the lips merely as from the heart. But now a word of myself. Tell me, fair being, and do not fear to speak plainly regarding my present condition: can I ever recover?"

"Great Medicine has pronounced you out of danger."

"Shall I ever regain the full use of all my limbs?"

"I know nothing to the contrary."

"And my wounds—what are they?"

"You were found with your head frightfully gashed, and your left arm badly bruised, apparently by the tread of a horse. Various other flesh wounds were found upon your person—made, seemingly, by some sharp instrument. These, together with loss of blood, produced a delirious fever, from which kind Providence has restored you, as it were by a miracle. For a week, life and death contended equally as it seemed for the victory. Many a time have I stood by your side, and thought every breath you drew would be your last. I can only compare your critical condition to a person suspended by a mere cord over a terrible abyss, with a strain upon it so equal to its strength that another pound would divide it and render death certain, and thus and there

hanging seven days and nights ere a safe footing could be effected on the solid earth above."

"You draw a fearful picture, Prairie Flower. But my friend—did he know of this?"

"Not fully. He knew you were badly wounded; but we gave him all the hope we could, lest, with his own wounds, the excitement should prove fatal to him also. As it was, he was often delirious, and raved of you, and accused himself of dragging you hither and being the cause of your misery, perhaps death. Had we informed him you were dead, I do not think he would have survived an hour."

"God bless him for a noble fellow! a true friend!" I cried, while tears of affection flooded my eyes.

As I spoke, I noticed the countenance of Prairie Flower became suddenly crimson, and then white as marble, while she averted her head and seemed uncommonly affected.

What all this meant, I was at a loss to conjecture. In fact I did not give it much thought, for my mind was filled with the image of Charles Huntly, and I quickly added:

"Is he not a noble friend, sweet Prairie Flower?"

"He is indeed!" she exclaimed, looking at me earnestly for a moment, as if to detect a hidden meaning in my words, and then dropping her eyes modestly to the ground.

"But his wounds?"

"He received two very severe contusions on the head, which rendered him insensible for several hours."

"And how is he now?"

"He has so far recovered that he leaves his lodge, and occasionally takes a short stroll."

"And has he not been to see me?"

"No! we would not permit him to do so."

"And how did a refusal affect him?"

"Quite seriously. But we told him that your life, in a great measure, depended on your being kept perfectly quiet; and that, as soon as he could do so with safety, he should be admitted to your presence. He seemed to grieve very much, but uttered no complaints."

"But you must let me see him now, Prairie Flower!"

"I do not know," she answered: "I will consult Great Medicine."

"But, Prairie Flower!" I called, as she turned away.

"Well?"

"Remember, I *must* see him!"

"But surely you would not endanger your life and his?"

"Certainly not. But do you think such would be the effect of our meeting?"

"I am unable to say, and that is why I wish to consult Cha-cha-chee-kee-ho-bah—or, as we often term him, Great Medicine.

"Go, then, and Heaven send I get a favorable answer!"

Prairie Flower turned away, and, approaching the Old-Man-of-the-Mountains, held with him a short consultation. Then returning to me, she said:

"Great Medicine thinks it imprudent; though, if you insist on it, he says you may meet; but at the same time he bids me warn you both to be cautious, and not become too much excited, or the worst of consequences may follow."

"I will endeavor to be calm, and see no cause why I should be more than ordinarily excited."

"You perhaps overlook, my friend, that a great change has taken place in the appearance of each of you since last you met; and your system being in a feeble state, a sight of your friend may affect you more than you are now aware of. The greatest change, however, is in yourself; and I must prepare your friend to behold in you a far different person than he beheld on the night of the battle. I charge you beforehand to brace your nerves and meet him calmly!"

Saying this, she turned and quitted the hovel.

CHAPTER XVII.

FALLING IN LOVE.



HALF an hour of the most anxious suspense followed the disappearance of Prairie Flower ; during which, in spite of myself, I suffered the most intense mental excitement ; my hands shook like the quaking aspen, and I felt both sick and faint. At the end of the time mentioned, Prairie Flower appeared and announced that my friend would shortly be with me.

“ But you seem agitated ! ” she added, with an expression of alarm.

“ A mere nothing, I assure you, ” I quickly replied, fearful she would alter her arrangement and put off our meeting to another day. “ My hand shakes a little, perhaps ; but you see, Prairie Flower, I am quite composed—quite collected indeed. ”

She shook her head doubtingly, and was about to reply, when Huntly made his appearance and approached me with a feeble step.

Heavens ! what a change in sooth ! A wild exclamation of alarm and surprise was already trembling on my lips, when, remembering the injunction of Prairie Flower, I by a great effort suppressed it.

Could this feeble, tottering form approaching me, indeed be the gay, dashing, enthusiastic Charles Huntly, whom I had known from boyhood ? His face was pale and thin ; his lips bloodless ; his eyes had lost much of their lustre, and moved somewhat nervously in their sunken sockets ; his cheek bones protruded, and his robust figure was wonderfully emaciated ; while the wonted expression of fire and soul in his intelligent countenance had given place to sedateness and melancholy. To complete, his head was rudely bandaged, and his habiliments exhibited marks of the recent conflict. If such was his appearance, what, judging from the re-

marks of Prairie Flower, must have been mine ! I shuddered at the thought.

As he came up, so that his eye could rest upon me, he suddenly started back, with a look of horror, threw up both hands, and exclaimed :

"Merciful God ! can this be Francis Leighton ?" and, staggering to my side, he dropped down upon the ground and burst into tears.

"Beware ! beware !" cried Prairie Flower, earnestly, her features turning deadly pale. "Remember, Charles Huntly—remember my warning ! or you will do what can never be undone, and all our efforts to save you both will have been made in vain !"

"Charles," gasped I ; "Charles—Huntly—my friend—compose yourself, or you will destroy us both !"

"Oh, Frank ! Frank !" he rejoined, somewhat wildly ; "I never thought to see you thus, when in an evil moment I urged you to leave home. Oh, why did I do it ? Forgive me, my friend—forgive me—or I shall go distracted !"

"For Heaven's sake, my friend, do not blame yourself ! I left my home by my own desire and free will. You are not to blame, any more than I. We could not foretell what fate had in store for us. Rather thank God, dear Charles, that we are both alive and likely to recover !"

"And you think, dear Frank, I am not to blame ?"

"Not in the least."

"God bless you for a generous soul ! Oh, if you could but know what I have suffered ! Tortures of mind beyond the strength of reason to bear."

"I have heard so from the lips of our sweet benefactress."

"Ay, sweet benefactress indeed ! God bless you, lovely Prairie Flower !" he added, passionately, suddenly turning his eyes upon her. "If you are not rewarded in this world, I am sure you will be in the next."

At the first sentence, the face of the maiden flushed, and then changed quickly to an ashen hue, while her breast heaved with some powerful emotion. She strove

to reply, but words failed her ; and, turning suddenly away, she rushed from the lodge, leaving us alone.

"Angelic creature!" pursued Huntly, gazing after her retreating form with an expression of sincere admiration. "A lily too fair to bloom in a region so desolate as this. But why did she leave us so abruptly, Frank?"

"I cannot say, unless it was her dislike of praise."

"I could adore her, Frank, for her goodness! Where would we be now, think you, but for her timely aid?"

"In another world, most probably," I answered, solemnly.

"Ay, truly in another world!" rejoined Huntly, with a sigh. "And you, Frank, if one may judge by your looks, are not far from there now. Merciful Father!" he continued, gazing steadily on me, while his eyes became filled with tears; "what a change! what a change! I cannot realize even now that I am speaking to Francis Leighton! And this is the work of one short week! Oh, how have I longed to see you, Frank! How on my knees have I cried, begged and implored to be permitted to see you! But I was denied—peremptorily denied—and now I am thankful for it; for had I seen you in that unconscious state described to me by Prairie Flower, I fear I should have lost my reason forever, and the sods of the valley would soon have been green above my mortal remains."

This was said with an air and tone so mournfully, touchingly sad, that in spite of myself I found my eyes swimming in tears.

"Well," I answered, "let us forget the past, and look forward with hope to the future; and return to Him—who has thus far watched over us with His all-seeing eye, and raised us up friends where we least expected them in our moments of affliction—the spontaneous thanks of grateful hearts!"

In this and like manner we conversed some half an hour without interruption.

As my friend had been struck down at the same moment with myself, he was of course unable to give me any information regarding what had happened after-

ward. Whether any of our friends had been killed or not, we had no means of ascertaining, and could only speculate upon the probability of this thing or that. What had become of Teddy? Had he survived? And, if so, what must have been his feelings when he found we came not to his call, and appeared not to his search!

This train of conversation again brought us back to Prairie Flower; and each had to rehearse the little he had gleaned, and the much he had surmised, concerning herself and her tribe; and in many points we found our conjectures to correspond exactly.

"By-the-by," I observed at length, "it seems as if I had seen some face like hers before; but where and when I cannot tell—perhaps in my dreams."

"Indeed!" replied Huntly, quickly; "and so have I; but I thought it might be fancy merely—or at least that you would think so—and therefore kept it to myself."

"Who, then, is the person?"

"You have no idea?"

"None in the least"

"And if I tell you, and you see no likeness, you will not ridicule my fancy?"

"Ridicule, Charles? No, certainly not. But why such a question?"

"You will understand that presently."

"Well, then, the lady?"

"Have you forgotten the fair Unknown?"

"Good heavens! how like!" I exclaimed. "You are right, my friend—there is indeed a wonderful likeness! Perhaps——But no! the idea is too chimerical."

"Speak it, Frank—perhaps what?"

"I was about to add, perhaps they are related; but that could not be."

"And why not?" asked Huntly. "Such a thing is not impossible."

"Very true—but most highly improbable, as you will admit. The beautiful Unknown we saw in New York; the beautiful Mysterious, if I may so term her, in the Far West: the former, perhaps, a daughter of fashion in the gay and polished circles of civilization: the latter among

barbarians, a prominent member of a roving tribe of savages."

"But you overlook that she could not have been bred among savages."

"And why not?"

"Because her English education, manners and accomplishments, all belie such a supposition. I admit with you that the suggestion advanced by yourself looks highly improbable—at the same time I contend as before it is not impossible."

"Well, at all events, Charles, you must admit it is utterly useless to argue a point founded solely upon speculation on both sides. We have no knowledge whatever of *Prairie Flower* upon which to found even a surmise, setting aside entirely that of the other party, and consequently must come out exactly where we started, neither of us the wiser for the discussion."

"Nothing more true," answered my friend, musingly. "I would to Heaven I could learn the history of *Prairie Flower*! Can she be an Indian?"

"I think not."

"What a perfect creature! and with a name as beautiful as her own fair self. Do you know, Frank, I—"

"Well, speak out!"

"You will not ridicule me?"

"No."

"I am half in love."

"With whom?"

"*Prairie Flower*."

"Indeed! Well, that is nothing strange for you. I feel grateful enough to love her myself. But, Charley, you did not allow her to perceive any symptoms of your passion?"

"Not that I am aware of. But why do you ask?"

"Because it would offend her."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"And wherefore, Frank?" asked my friend, rather anxiously.

"Wherefore, Charley? Why, I believe you are in love in earnest."

"Have I not admitted it?"

"Only partially."

"Then I acknowledge it fully."

"But how about the Unknown?"

"I am in love with her too."

"Ay, and with every pretty face you meet. But surely you are not serious in this matter?"

"I fear I am," sighed Huntly.

"But you cannot love either much, when you acknowledge to loving both."

"You forget the resemblance between the two. I could love any being, in the absence of the Unknown, who bore her likeness."

"But, for Heaven's sake, Charley, do not let Prairie Flower know of this! for it would only be to make her avoid us and perhaps result in unpleasant consequences."

"And yet, Frank, at the risk of being thought egotistical, I must own I have reasons for thinking my passion returned."

"Returned, say you? Why, are you dreaming?"

"No, in my sober senses."

"And what reasons, I pray?"

"Her manner toward me whenever we meet, and whenever I speak to her. Surely you must have noticed her embarrassment and change of countenance when I addressed her last, ere her hasty departure."

"I did—but attributed it, as I told you then, to a dislike of flattery or praise to the face."

"I formed a different opinion."

"Why then did you ask me the cause of her leaving so abruptly?"

"Merely to see if you suspected the same thing—that, if so, my own fancies might have the surer foundation. Often, when she thought herself unnoticed, have I, by turning suddenly upon her, caught her soft, dark eyes fixed earnestly upon me, with an expression of deep, quiet, melancholy tenderness, which I could not account for, other than an affectionate regard for myself; and the more so, that when my eye caught hers, she ever turned her gaze away, blushed, and seemed much con-

fused. It was this which first divided my thoughts between herself and you, and awakened in my breast a feeling of sympathy and affection for her in return."

"You may be right," I answered, as I recalled her strange manner of the day previous, when I spoke to her of my friend—and I proceeded to detail it to Huntly. "But I am truly sorry it is so," I added, in conclusion.

"Why so, Frank?"

"Because it will only render her unhappy for life."

"What! if I—"

"Well, say on! If you what, Charley?"

"I was going to add—a—marry her," he replied, in some confusion.

"Marry her? Are you mad, Huntly?"

"Only a little deranged."

"Not a little, either, if one may judge by such a remark. Why, my friend, you talk of marrying as if it were the most trifling thing in the world. You cannot be in earnest, surely! and it is a bad matter for a jest."

"I am not jesting, at all events," he replied. "But why not marry her, if we both love? Is there anything so remarkable in marriage?"

I looked at him earnestly, to detect if possible some sly curl of the lip, some little sign which I could construe into a quizzical meaning; but no! the expression of his countenance was uncommonly serious—if anything, rather melancholy. He was sincere beyond a doubt, and the very fact kept me dumb with surprise.

"You do not answer," he said, at length. "Perhaps you do not believe in my sincerity?"

"Ay, too truly I do," I rejoined; "and the very knowledge made me speechless. Why, my dear friend, what are you thinking of? You, the young, wealthy, aristocratic Charles Huntly, talking seriously to me of marriage! and that to a nameless Indian girl, of whose history you know nothing, and whose acquaintance you have made within a week! What! can this be the same wild, reckless schoolmate of mine, whose mind six months ago rarely harbored an idea beyond uttering a jest or playing a prank upon some unsuspecting indi-

vidual? Surely you are not in your sober senses, Charley! or else this is a land of miracles indeed."

"I am not what I was," sighed my friend, "though I believe I am not the less in my senses notwithstanding. That I was a gay, wild youth once, is no reason I should always remain one. To me there appears nothing remarkable that one whose life has been a scene of folly should become changed by the near approach of death. I have suffered too much within the past week, both in body and mind, not to have had very serious reflections. As regards Prairie Flower, I acknowledge as before that I am totally ignorant of her history; that, as you say, I have known her barely a week; but I cannot forget that I am her debtor, both for my own life and yours. That she is a rare being, too good almost to grace a world so cold and uncharitable as this, no one who has seen and conversed with her as much as I have can doubt for a moment. Regarding marriage, I am very far from thinking it a trifling affair—on the contrary, one of the most serious of a man's life. It is an event to make or mar his happiness; and for that reason it should be considered with all due solemnity, and everything pertaining to it duly weighed, that nothing may afterward be found wanting. Had I proposed to you to unite myself with a lady of fine accomplishments and fortune, would you have asked the question if both loved? if she were one to make me happy? Probably not; for her wealth would be the 'silver veil' to conceal all her defects. Should a man take the solemn vows of marriage to please himself or friends? Should he do so merely to make a display in public, and render his heart in private the seat of misery? Of what value is gold if it add nothing to a man's happiness? Riches are unstable, and often, as the proverb has it, 'take to themselves wings and fly away.' And then, to him who has made these his god—who has wedded them and not the *woman*—what is the result? A few days of misery and an unhappy end. Do not conclude from this, my dear Frank, that I have resolved to marry Prairie Flower; for until it was suggested by your own remarks, such a thought never entered my mind; and even now such a result is highly improbable. I

merely hinted at the possibility of the thing, to ascertain what effect it would have upon you."

"Well, I am happy in knowing the matter is not so serious as I was at first led to suppose. Take my word, Charley, it is only a mere whim of the moment, which will pass away with a return of health and strength. When the body becomes diseased, it is not uncommon for the mind to be affected also; and though the idea you have suggested may seem plausible now—mark me! you will yet live to think it preposterous, and to laugh at your present folly."

"Then, Frank, you think my mind unsound?"

"Not in a healthy state, certainly—or, with your quick sense of perception, you would have become aware, ere this, that, no matter how deep her love, Prairie Flower is one to reject even Charles Huntly."

"Reject me, Frank, say you? reject me?" cried Huntly, quickly, with a look of surprise.

"Ay, reject you—even you—the rich, educated and polished Charles Huntly."

"And why, Frank?"

"First, because her proud, retiring nature would rebel at the thought of an alliance with one whom the world might consider her superior. Secondly, because her sense of duty would not allow her to depart from her tribe, to which she belongs either by birth or adoption! Thirdly, and conclusively, because she is one who has evidently resolved to remain single through life. She is a girl possessed of a remarkable mind, which, once fixed upon a point, remains unchangeable forever. That she loves you, I now believe; that you return the passion, in a measure, you have acknowledged; but that she would consent to leave her tribe and pledge herself to you for life, I believe to be a thing impossible."

"You perhaps have reasons for thinking thus?" observed Huntly, eyeing me sharply.

"Nothing more than what I have gathered from noting her closely during the brief period of our acquaintance. I may be wrong, but time will show. At all events, my friend, I warn you, if you feel an increasing passion or affection for this girl, to suppress it at

once, and leave the vicinity as soon as the health of both of us will permit."

"I will think of it, my dear friend ; and, in the meantime, do you watch *Prairie Flower* closely—as I will myself—to learn if your surmises be correct ; and, should a convenient opportunity offer, fail not to use it to find out the true state of her feelings regarding myself. I——But enough—she comes."

As he spoke, *Prairie Flower* entered the lodge to put an end to our conversation, lest harm might be done me by too much excitement. I now observed her narrowly, and saw there was a constraint in her manner, which she only the more exposed by trying to conceal it and appear perfectly natural. She gently reminded *Huntly* it was time for him to withdraw ; and though he strove hard to catch the soft glance of her dark, beaming eyes, yet all his efforts proved fruitless ; and pressing my hand, with a hearty "God bless you !" and a deep, earnest prayer for my speedy recovery, he quitted the apartment.

Asking me one or two questions regarding the effect produced upon me by my friend's visit, and finding instead of injury it had resulted to my benefit, *Prairie Flower* bade me seek instant repose in sleep ; and promising that *Huntly* should see me again on the following day, she turned, and, in a musing mood, with her head drooping, and her eyes bent upon the ground, slowly and with an air of sadness disappeared from my view.

There was no mistaking it ; *Prairie Flower* was in love with my friend ; and I sighed at the thought that the hour of her friendship to us might prove the beginning of her own unhappiness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS OR GREAT MEDICINE TRIBE.



TIME rolled on slowly, each day adding something to my convalescence, and the expiration of a month found me so far recovered as to venture on a short stroll in the open air.

During this long period of confinement (it seemed very long to me), Prairie Flower and Huntly visited me every day, though rarely together, and toward the last my friend became an almost constant companion.

Never shall I forget the emotions of gratitude and joy which I experienced on beholding once more the green leaves and blades, the bright flowers and glorious sunshine, feeling again the soft, balmy breeze of heaven upon my emaciated frame, and hearing the artless songs of the forest warblers. Earth, which for a time had seemed cold and dreary, now appeared changed to a heavenly paradise, and I could not realize I had ever seen it look so enchantingly beautiful before. In this I was doubtless correct ; for never before had I been absent from it so long ; and the contrast between the grim, rude walls of my late abode, and all I now beheld, was enough to have put in ecstasies a far less excitable and enthusiastic individual than myself.

The village of the Mysterious or Great Medicine Tribe I found to consist of some fifteen or twenty lodges, situated on the side of the mountain, overlooking a beautiful valley some quarter of a mile below, through which flowed a murmuring stream that formed one of the tributaries of the Platte.

The cabins, though only temporarily erected, were very comfortable, and placed so as to form a complete circle, in the center of which stood the Great Medicine lodge of Cha-cha-chee-kee-ho-bah, where I had been confined ; and by which, as I now learned, I had been highly

honored, inasmuch as not a soul besides its owner and Prairie Flower, unless by special permission, was ever allowed to cross its threshold. This accounted for my not having seen any of the tribe during my confinement in bed.

The Great Medicine lodge, and one other, were distinguished from the rest by their whitish appearance, done probably by a limish composition found on the mountains. This other was the residence of Prairie Flower, and two young, dark-skinned, black-haired, bright-eyed, pretty-faced, Indian girls, whose countenances and costumes bespoke intelligence and superiority.

Among this tribe were some twenty females, as many children, and about thirty adult males, all of whom were decently clad, and clean and tidy in their appearance. Save Prairie Flower, but very few of them wore any kind of ornaments, and their dark, clear skins were not in the least bedaubed with paint. Most of them spoke the English language, and some quite fluently; and I observed many an old, well-thumbed book, generally a Bible, lying about their wigwams. In their intercourse with myself and friend they displayed a dignified courtesy, and not one of all the children did I ever observe to behave in a rude or unbecoming manner.

They were, take them all in all, a remarkable people, and rightly named the Mysterious Tribe; and, as far as I could judge, very zealous in the cause of Christianity. Three times a day did they collect for public devotion to the Great Spirit; and their ceremony, though simple, was one of the most impressive I ever witnessed. It was in the following manner:

At sunrise, noon and sunset, Prairie Flower and her two Indian companions would come forth from their lodge, arrayed in neat and simple attire, each bearing in her hand a kind of drum, or tambourine without the bells, and, approaching the Great Medicine Lodge, would arrange themselves in its front. Then bowing to the east and west, the north and south, they would beat the tambourines with their fingers; whereupon the whole village—men, women and children—would hastily quit whatever occupation they might be at, and assemble

around them, their faces expressive of the importance and solemnity which they attached to the occasion. The tambourines would continue to beat until all were gathered together, when a deep and impressive silence would ensue, during which each face would be turned upward, as if to solicit the Great Guardian of all to be with them in their devotions. Then the maidens would strike out into a clear, silvery song, and at the end of each stanza would be joined in the chorus by all of both sexes, young and old, during which each would kneel upon the earth, and continue there until the commencement of the next, when all would again rise to their feet.

These songs, of which there were three, were translated to me by Prairie Flower, at my request; and I herewith give them—if not in language, at least in spirit and sentiment—commencing with the

MORNING SONG.

The day is up, the sun appears,
That sun of many thousand years,
And morning smiles through evening's tears :
Thanks! thanks! thanks!
To Thee who made the earth and sky,
The hosts that go revolving by,
And all that live and all that die—
God! God! God!

CHORUS.

Kneel! kneel! kneel!
Oh, bless us, Spirit,
That doth inherit
The earth and air,
And everywhere!
And save us, Thou,
To whom we bow,
All humbly now,
Our Great and Heavenly Father.

The day is up, and through our sleep
We've felt no visitations deep,
And nothing wherefore we should weep;
Thanks! thanks! thanks!
Preserve us still throughout the day,
Teach us to seek the better way,
And never let us go astray—
God! God! God!

CHORUS.

Kneel ! kneel ! kneel !
Oh, bless us, Spirit,
That doth inherit
The earth and air,
And everywhere !
And save us, Thou,
To whom we bow,
All humbly now,
Our Great and Heavenly Father !

NOON-DAY SONG.

The day moves on and all goes well,
More blessings now than we can tell,
With gratitude our hearts do swell:
Thanks ! thanks ! thanks !
Bless and preserve us still, we pray,
With food and raiment line our way,
And keep us to the close of day—
God ! God ! God !

CHORUS.

Kneel ! kneel ! kneel !
Father of Heaven,
To Thee be given
Unbounded praise,
Through endless days !
And like the sun,
In Heaven above,
Pour on us now
Thy warmth of love !
And may our feet
Forever press
The virtuous paths
Which Thou dost bless !
To Thee all praise, Lord, God, our Father !

The noon-day breezes now go by,
The forest gives a welcome sigh,
The murmuring streamlets sweet reply :
Thanks ! thanks ! thanks !
The birds carol, the insects sing,
And joy beams out in everything,
For which all praise to Thee we bring—
God ! God ! God !

CHORUS.

Kneel ! kneel ! kneel !
Father of Heaven,

THE MYSTERIOUS TRIBE.

To Thee be given
 Unbounded praise,
 Through endless days !
 And like the sun,
 In heaven above,
 Pour on us now
 Thy warmth of love !
 And may our feet
 Forever press,
 The virtuous paths
 Which Thou dost bless !
 To Thee all praise, Lord, God, our Father !

EVENING SONG.

The day is dying, wood and wold
 Are growing dim, as we behold,
 And night will soon us all enfold :
 Thanks ! thanks ! thanks !
 That Thou the day hast kept us through,
 Taught each his duty right to do,
 And made us all so happy too—
 God ! God ! God !

CHORUS.

Kneel ! kneel ! kneel !
 All Heaven, and earth, and sea, and sky,
 Are marked by His All-Seeing Eye,
 Which will look deep into the night,
 To note if each one doeth right,
 And watch us in our dreams of sleep,
 On all our thoughts and actions keep :
 So may each thought, each deed we do,
 Be one that will bear looking through !
 And bless us, Thou,
 To whom we bow,
 All humbly now,
 Most great Lord, God, Almighty !

The sun hath set in yonder west,
 The beasts and birds are seeking rest,
 All nature is in sable dressed :
 Thanks ! thanks ! thanks !
 Preserve us, Thou, till morning light
 Doth lift the sable veil of night !
 May holy angels guard us right,
 Our sleep be sweet, our dreams be bright,
 And not a thing our souls affright—
 God ! God ! God !

CHORUS.

Kneel ! kneel ! kneel !
All Heaven, and earth, and sea, and sky,
Are marked by His All-Seeing Eye,
Which will look deep into the night,
To note if each one doeth right,
And watch us in our dreams of sleep,
On all our thoughts and actions keep:
So may each thought, each deed we do,
Be one that will bear looking through !
And bless us, Thou,
To whom we bow,
All humbly now,
Most great Lord, God, Almighty !

It is impossible for me to convey the sweet and plaintive melody which accompanied each song, and which, before I knew a word that was uttered, produced upon my mind, and that of my friend, the most pleasing and solemn effect—particularly as we noted that each was accompanied with an earnestness and sincerity of manner such as I had rarely witnessed in Christian churches within the borders of civilization.

At the end of each of these songs, and while the assemblage remained in the kneeling posture of the chorus, the Old-Man-of-the-Mountains would suddenly make his appearance, and hooping his arms before him and bowing, after the Turkish fashion, would utter a few words as a sort of benediction—whereupon all would rise, and each depart quietly to his lodge, or to his previous occupation.

The devotional scenes just mentioned were of everyday occurrence, when nothing of importance had transpired to elate the actors with joy or depress them with grief—in either of which events, the songs and manner of worship were changed to suit the occasion.

With this people, a wedding or a funeral was a very important affair ; and as I sojourned some two months or more among them, ere my strength permitted me to depart, I had an opportunity of witnessing both.

As the former was the first in order of occurrence, I shall proceed to describe it first.

The bride was an interesting Indian maiden, some seventeen years of age, and the groom a tall, athletic In-

dian, her senior by at least five more. Both were becomingly decked with wampum belts, figured moccasins, and various ornaments worn around the neck and arms; those of the maiden being bare below the elbow, and displaying her rich, dark skin to good advantage. Around the head of each was bound a wreath of ivy, diversified with a few sprigs of cedar, emblematical, as I was informed, of their love, which must ever remain green and unfading.

The nuptial ceremony took place in the lodge of the bride, and was as follows:

On the announcement that all was ready, a deputation of maidens, consisting for the most part of Prairie Flower and her companions, surrounded the bride. Placing their hands on her head, they asked her several questions, pertaining to herself and lover; the most important of which were, if she truly loved him she was about to take forever, and thought that marriage would increase her happiness. Receiving replies in the affirmative, they commenced singing, in a low, melodious tone, the subjoined

BRIDAL SONG.

Blooming maiden,
Heavy laden
With new hopes, and joys, and fears—
Sad with gladness,
Glad with sadness,
Thou art going, young in years,
To another,
More than brother,
Father, mother,
Or aught other,
Which among thy race appears.

We have bound thee,
As we found thee,
With unfading green wreathed thee—
Emblem fitting,
Unremitting
Must thy love forever be;
That thou ever
Must endeavor
Not to sever,
Now, nor never,
Bonds of time, eternity.

Now go, maiden,
Sweetly laden
With all blessings we've in store—
Take him to thee,
Who did woo thee,
Deeper love him than before ;
God be sending
His defending,
Joy portending,
Never ending
Blessings on thee, evermore !

On the conclusion of this song, each of the singers laid her right hand upon the head of the bride, and commenced dancing around her in a circle. This lasted some ten minutes, during which time a deputation of Indian youths—or what in any other tribe would have been termed braves—led forward the groom to within a few feet of his intended, and commenced a similar dance around him, accompanying it with a song, the same in sentiment, if not in language, as the one just given. This dance over, the youths and maidens fell back in two rows, facing each other, while the groom and bride modestly advanced, unattended, and took hold of hands.

In this manner all quitted the lodge for the open air, where the villagers were drawn up to receive them, and who immediately formed a dense circle around them. Then, amid a deep silence, all kneeled upon the earth, and, rising, pointed their right forefingers to the sky, bowing to the four great points of compass. Then all, save the bride and groom, united in the following

BRIDAL CHORUS.

Joined in heart, and joined in hand,
By great Heaven's wise decree,
Ye must ever so endeavor
That ye ne'er may parted be—
Never ! never !
So, forever,
May Almighty Power bless ye,
In your prime,
And through all time,
And on through all eternity.

As the chorus concluded, the ring opened, and the Old-Man-of-the-Mountains made his appearance, bearing in one hand a long staff, and in the other a horn cup of smoking incense, which he waved to and fro. Approaching the bride and groom, he held it between them ; and then laying his staff on their heads, and bidding them again join hands, he proceeded to chant, in a feeble, cracked voice, the

CLOSING MARRIAGE STRAIN.

As this incense to Heaven,
So your vows here are given,
And written by angels above,
On the ponderous pages,
Of the great Book of Ages,
And stamped with His great Seal of Love.

By earth and by air,
By water and fire,
By everything under the sun-
By your own plighted faith,
To be true unto death,
In God's name I pronounce you twain one.

Waving his stick once more above their heads, and uttering his usual word "Onhchi," Great Medicine retraced his steps to his lodge.

On his departure, the friends of the newly-married pair stepped forward, in the order of relation, and greeted both with a hearty shaking of hands and invocations of blessings from the Great Spirit.

Then followed a feast, prepared for the occasion, consisting principally of buffalo, bear and deer meat, together with that of various wild fowls. This was eaten seated upon buffalo skins, and was served to the larger party by four waiters, two of both sexes. After this came one or two more songs, in which all joined, and a general dance closed the festivities of the day.

The funeral which I witnessed was that of a young man greatly beloved by his tribe. The day succeeding his death was the one appointed for the solemn ceremony of sepulture.

Meantime the body remained in the lodge where the

vital spark had been extinguished ; and, locked up with it, from all intrusion, remained also the near relatives of the deceased, fasting and employing their moments in prayer.

When the time for the funeral service had arrived, four Indian youths, who had been companions of the deceased, entered the lodge, and, wrapping the body in a buffalo-robe, bore it to that of Great Medicine, and deposited it on the ground outside.

Hither followed the relatives, their heads bound with withered flowers and leaves, emblematical of the decay of everything earthly, however fair and beautiful. Forming a narrow circle around the body, they kneeled upon the earth, and, placing their right hands upon the breast of the departed, and their left upon their hearts, uttered low and plaintive moans, the signal that all was ready for the mournful rite.

Next appeared Prairie Flower, with three other maidens, and, joining the youths, all clasped hands and formed a ring outside the circle of kneeling and weeping relatives. Then they commenced walking round the living and the dead, and, as they passed the head of the latter, each uttered a short prayer that his noble spirit might find eternal rest beyond the grave.

When this was concluded, Great Medicine appeared, holding in his hand a drum, which he beat rapidly a few times, whereupon the remainder of the villagers came forth from their lodges and formed a third circle outside of all. The second circle now fell back to the largest, leaving a wide space between it and the mourners, who still remained kneeling as before. A short silence followed, when the leader of the corpse bearers stepped forward and set forth, in a clear, musical tone, the many virtues of the deceased, and pronounced an eloquent eulogy over his remains.

On the conclusion of this, the speaker took his place among the rest, when all broke forth in the following

FUNERAL DIRGE.

Gone ! gone ! gone !
From earth gone forever :

No more here we'll meet him,
No more here we'll greet him,
No more, nevermore—
All is o'er, evermore—
Forever ! forever !
He's gone from the mortal—
He's passed Death's great portal—
And now will his spirit
Forever inherit,
In regions of bliss,
What it could not in this.
Passed from all sorrow,
Vexation and care,
Gone to the regions
That bright angels share,
In yon golden Heaven
His spirit will rest,
With joys the most holy
Forever be blessed.

Weep ! weep ! weep !
But weep not in sorrow :
With tears bend above him—
With tears show you love him—
But weep for relief,
Rather than grief—
For to-morrow—to-morrow—
Ye may join him in glory,
To tell the bright story,
Of earthly denials,
Losses and trials,
Of unwavering faith,
Of your joy to meet death,
That your spirit in freedom
Forever may roam,
O'er the sweet vales of Eden,
Your last lovely home—
To join there in singing,
As bright angels do,
The songs of Great Spirit,
Eternity through.

This was sung to a mournful tune ; and when the last strain had died away upon the air, all simultaneously dropped upon their knees, and bowed their heads to the earth, in token of submission to the Divine Will.

Then they rose to their feet, mourners and all, and, forming themselves into two long lines, the four bearers

proceeded to raise the corpse slowly and in silence. Then, preceded by Great Medicine, and followed by the maidens, the relatives and the rest, two by two, all moved solemnly forward to the last earthly resting-place of the dead—a rude grave scooped out in the side of the mountain, some forty rods distant from the village.

Depositing the body in the ground, with all due reverence, the bearers threw upon it a handful of loose earth, and moved aside for the others to do the same. This concluded, the villagers formed a large ring around the open grave, when Great Medicine stepped forward to the center and chanted

THE LAST DIRGE.

Formed of dust
The spirit spurneth,
Back to dust
The body turneth—
But the spirit,
Passed death's portal,
Doth become
A thing immortal.

Ye who mourn him,
Be unshaken,
That Who gave,
Again hath taken—
That the dead,
Before ye lying,
Made a happy
Change in dying.
And ye dead,
Here rest in quiet
Till ye hear
The final fiat,
That in voice,
More loud than thunder,
Shall command
Your tomb asunder !
To earth we consign thee !
To God we resign thee !

CHORUS.

Sleep ! sleep ! sleep !
The birds shall carol o'er thy head,
The stream shall murmur o'er its bed,

The breeze shall make the forest sigh,
And flowers above thee bloom and die—
But birds, and stream, and breeze, and flowers,
Shall joy no more thy sleeping hours.
 To earth we consign thee !
 To God we resign thee !
 Farewell !

The chorus was sung by all with impressive solemnity. On its conclusion, the four corpse bearers advanced, and with wooden spades buried the dead forever from the sight of the living. Then, two by two, in the same order they had come hither, the whole party returned to the village, and the day was spent in fasting and devotional exercises.

The food of the Great Medicine Tribe consisted, for the most part, of meat of various wild animals, which they generally killed with rifles, together with a few fish, for which they angled in the streams. Sometimes they planted and raised a small patch of corn, as was the case in the present instance ; but their roving life, as a general thing, led them to depend upon game and such vegetable food as chanced in their way.

Among them they owned some fifteen horses, as many tame goats, which they milked daily, and twice the number of mules. They also owned a few traps, and, when in a beaver country, did not fail using them to procure pelts ; which, together with buffalo and bear skins, they traded with the whites for such articles as they considered useful.

With them all property, with the exception of bodily raiment, was in common ; and each labored, not for himself alone, but for his neighbor also. During the day their animals fed around the encampment, and in the valley at the base of the mountain—but at night all were driven in and yarded within the village.

Never before had I seen a people appear so wholly content with whatever Providence might give them, and so perfectly happy among themselves ; and the time I spent with them, after I had become able to be abroad, however singular the statement may seem to others, I must account one of the most pleasant periods of my life.

CHAPTER XIX.

PREPARING TO RESUME OUR JOURNEY.



T was about the beginning of September, that I found my wounds so far healed and my strength so much restored as to think seriously of taking my departure. The air, too, on the mountains, was becoming cool and frosty ; and as my friend and I had decided on crossing to Oregon or California before the snow-storms of winter should entirely bar our progress, we thought it best to be on the move as soon as possible.

During my stay in the village, I saw and conversed more or less with Prairie Flower every day, and noted with regret that her features gradually grew more and more pale, her eyes more languid and less bright, her step less elastic and buoyant, and that she moved slowly and heavily over the ground, with her head bent forward in a mood of deep abstraction. The cause of this I was at no loss to conjecture, particularly as I saw a studied effort on her part to avoid my friend on all occasions, and that, when they did meet, she ever exhibited toward him a coldness totally foreign to her warm, frank, open, generous nature.

Huntly noticed her seeming aversion to him, with less philosophy than I had expected to see him display. In fact he became exceedingly troubled about it, and often told me, with a sigh, that he must have been mistaken, that she did not love him, but that it was me on whom her affections were placed.

I contradicted him only so far as to say, that she cared no more for me than for him ; but I did not care to tell him the real cause of her coldness—for I saw it would only serve to inflame his passion, and, from what I could judge, render both the more unhappy.

That Prairie Flower loved my friend, and that too against her will, was to me as clear as daylight ; and the

anguish it must have cost her gentle heart, to avoid and appear cold and indifferent toward him, I could better imagine than realize. Several times had I been tempted to broach the subject to her, that I might learn from her lips the true state of her heart ; but the slightest allusion to my friend always produced such visible, painful embarrassment, that I instantly abandoned the idea, and adroitly changed the conversation to something as foreign as possible. Of one thing I became satisfied ; and that was, that the sooner we took our departure, the better it would be for all parties ; for both Prairie Flower and Huntly were becoming touched with a melancholy that I feared might lead to something more serious.

Accordingly, as soon as I fancied my strength sufficient to encounter the fatigues of a perilous journey, I announced my intention to Huntly, and wrung from him a reluctant consent to depart forthwith. My next move was to see Prairie Flower, and announce the same to her.

As chance would have it, I shortly discovered her just outside the village, taking a stroll by herself—a habit which had now become with her of daily occurrence. Bidding my friend remain in the village, I hastened after, and presently overtook her ; but so deep was she buried in meditation, that my steps, close behind, failed to rouse her from her reverie.

“You seem lost in communion with your own thoughts, sweet Prairie Flower !” I said, in a cheerful tone ; “and were I bent on surprising you, I might have done so to good advantage.”

She started, a slight flush suffused her pale features, and, turning her lovely countenance upon me, with an expression of deep surprise, she rallied herself for a reply.

“Really, I must crave pardon, Mr. Leighton ! but I was so engaged in reflecting on—a—various matters, that I failed to catch the sound of your footsteps.”

“I saw you were deeply abstracted, and would not have intruded on your privacy, only that I have a matter of some little moment to communicate.”

“Indeed !” she rejoined, turning deadly pale and

trembling nervously : " I trust nothing has happened to—to—any one ?"

" Give yourself no uneasiness, dear Prairie Flower ! I have only come to thank you, and through you your friends, for the kindness and unbounded hospitality of all to myself and Huntly, and inform you that we are on the point of taking our departure."

For a moment after I spoke, Prairie Flower stood staring upon me with an expression of intense anguish, her breast heaving tumultuously, and apparently without the power to utter a syllable in reply. At length, placing her hand to her throat, as if she felt a choking sensation, she fairly gasped forth :

" Not—not—going—surely ?"

" I fear we must, dear Prairie Flower !" I answered, sadly—for I felt touched to the very soul at this unusual display of feeling and sorrowful regret at our departure—coming too from one to whom both Huntly and I were under such deep obligations for the preservation of our lives and the many kindnesses we had received. " We have intruded upon your hospitality too long already," I continued, " and have at last decided to depart immediately."

" But—but—your wounds ?"

" Are nearly healed."

" And your—your—strength ?"

" Sufficient for the journey, I think."

" And whither go you ?"

" Over the mountains—to Oregon, or California, as the case may be."

" But have you considered the dangers ?"

" Everything."

" But the Indians may be in your path ?"

" We must take our chances, then, as before. We have decided on taking a new route, however, and consequently will avoid all ambuscades."

" Still there are ten thousand dangers on a new route. You may get lost, get buried in the snows of the mountains, fall over some precipice—or, escaping all these, get captured by some roving tribe and put to the tortures."

"There are many dangers, sweet Prairie Flower, as you say ; but had we feared to encounter them we should never have been here."

"You have no horses !"

"We can purchase them at Fort Laramie, together with what other things we may need."

"You have no companions !"

"We may find some there, also—if not, we can venture alone."

"But—but—. You will go, then ?"

"I fear we must—loth as we are to part from you and your people, with whom (I wish not to flatter when I say it), some of the happiest moments of my life have been spent."

For some time Prairie Flower did not reply, during which her eyes were cast upon the ground. A look of deep sorrow settled over her lovely features, and her bosom heaved with internal emotions. Raising her soft, dark eyes again to mine, I was pained to behold them slightly dimmed with tears, which she had striven in vain to repress.

"I did not think," she said, with a deep sigh, "that you would leave us so soon."

"Soon, dear Prairie Flower? God bless your noble soul ! Soon, say you ? Why, have we not been here two long months and more ?"

"True," she answered, as I fancied a little reproachfully, "I had forgotten that the time must have seemed long to you."

"Nay, sweet Prairie Flower, I meant not that. You are too sensitive—you misconstrue me. I only meant that it was long for utter strangers to share your hospitality and trouble you with their presence."

"You would not trouble us if you stayed forever," she rejoined, with an air of such sweet simplicity, that, in spite of all my assumed stoicism, I felt a tear trembling in my eye.

Prairie Flower saw it, and quickly added, with an earnest, tender look, which could only be realized by being seen :

"Oh, sir ! I fear I have wounded your feelings !"

No wonder Huntly was in love, if he had ever seen anything like this—for, with all my philosophy and sober reasoning, I felt myself in a fair way of becoming his rival.

"God bless you, Prairie Flower!" I exclaimed from my very heart. "If Heaven holds many like you, no wonder it is a Paradise beyond mortal conception."

"Oh, do not compare me with those who dwell in that bright realm!" she quickly rejoined; "for I at best am only a poor, sinful mortal."

"Then God help me!" I ejaculated—"if *you* are considered a sinner."

"But your—your—friend?" she said, hesitatingly. "Is—he—anxious to leave us?"

She strove to assume an indifference as she said this; but the effort to do so only the more exposed her feelings; of which, becoming aware, she blushed deeply, and on the conclusion hung her head in real embarrassment.

"No, dear Prairie Flower," I said, appearing not to notice her confusion; "my friend is not anxious to leave; on the contrary, it was with much difficulty I could convince him of the necessity for our immediate departure, and gain his consent to set forth."

"And wherefore, do you think, is he loth to go?" she asked, carelessly turning her head aside, and stooping to pick a beautiful flower that was growing at her feet.

"Because sweet Prairie Flower goes not with him!" I answered, rather abruptly, curious to see what effect such information would produce.

The next moment I regretted I had not hinted, rather than spoken, this important truth. As I pronounced the sentence, the hand of Prairie Flower, which was already clasping the stem of the flower in the act of breaking it, became violently agitated and relaxed its hold; while its owner, raising her face, as pale as death, staggered back, and, but for my support, would have fallen to the ground.

"Good heavens, Prairie Flower!" I exclaimed, throwing an arm around her slender waist, and feigning

ignorance of the cause of her agitation; "what has happened? Are you bit? or stung? Speak! quick! tell me!"

"A-a-little weakness—a-a-sudden weakness—a-a-kind of faintness!" she stammered, endeavoring to recover her composure, and evidently relieved that I had not imputed her agitation to the right cause. "I don't know that I ever was so affected before," she continued, smiling faintly. "But I think it will soon pass away. I feel much relieved now. There, there—thank you! that will do. Quite sudden, was it not?"

"Quite, indeed!" I replied; adding, mentally, "Poor girl! how I pity you!—your peace of mind is gone forever!"

"But you spoke of leaving immediately," she resumed. "What day have you set for your departure?"

"This."

"Not to-day, surely?" she exclaimed, in surprise.

"So had we determined."

"But you must not go to-day!"

"And why not?"

"Oh, it is not right to leave us so abruptly; and besides, I have reasons for wishing you to delay three days at least!"

"What reasons?"

"I cannot tell you now; but remain, and you shall know."

"Anything to please you, sweet Prairie Flower?"

"Then I have your promise?"

"You have."

"Thank you! thank you!—you will not regret it. But come, let us return to the village—for I see the sun is three good hours above the hills, and I have a long journey before me."

"What! are you going to leave, then!"

"I must! I have important business. But ask me no questions, and do not depart till I return."

Half an hour later, Prairie Flower, mounted on her beautiful Indian pony, as I had first beheld her at Fort Laramie, rode swiftly out of the village, unattended, and disappeared down the mountain.

CHAPTER XX.

FINAL PARTING WITH PRAIRIE FLOWER.



THREE days dragged on wearily—for without Prairie Flower the Indian village seemed gloomy and dull both to Huntly and myself—and the fourth morning had come, and yet our fair benefactress had not made her appearance.

Where had she gone? and wherefore did she not return? We questioned several of the villagers; but all shook their heads and replied, some in good and some in broken English, that they did not know, that she was frequently absent a month at a time, and that she rarely told on leaving where she was going or when she would return.

Perhaps, then, her journey was merely taken to avoid a farewell scene, thinking we should depart in her absence; and this I mentioned to Huntly, whose surmises I found corresponded with mine.

“She has done it,” he said, somewhat bitterly, “to put a slight upon us, or rather upon me, whose presence lately seems most offensive to her; and for myself I am going to leave—you can do as you like.”

In this I knew my friend was wrong altogether; but I did not contradict him—for, under the circumstances, I preferred he should think as he did, rather than be made aware of what, as I imagined, was the true cause of her actions. I therefore replied:

“Let us away, then, as soon as possible!”

“Agreed.”

Upon this we hastened to bid our Indian friends a long adieu. They seemed greatly surprised, and expressed astonishment that we should leave so suddenly, without having given them a previous notice.

Having gone the entire rounds, shook the dusky hands of each, young and old—Great Medicine not excepted, who

enlarged his small, dark eyes to their utmost, but merely grunted a farewell—and thanked each and all heartily for their hospitality and kindness to us as strangers, we prepared to set out at once for Fort Laramie.

As the direct route was unknown to us, we inquired the way particularly—whereupon a stout, rather good-looking, intelligent Indian youth, volunteered his services to act as guide—a proposition which we readily and gratefully accepted, with a promised reward when we should arrive safely at our destination.

It was a bright, clear morning, and the sun, just rising above the mountains, poured down his radiant light, gladdening the forest and our hearts with his presence; and this, together with the bracing air, the freedom we fancied we were about to experience after our long confinement, in being once more upon our journey in good health, produced such feelings of buoyancy and independence as we had not known for many a long day.

Our guide had left us, as he said, to make preparations for our journey, and we were already becoming impatient at what we considered his tardiness, when to our surprise he reappeared, mounted on one, and leading two horses, which he significantly intimated were at our service. This was a kindness we could fully appreciate, and of course felt no desire to chide him for his delay. Thanking him in unmeasured terms for his happy foresight in thus insuring us speed, and safety against fatigue, we mounted with almost as much agility as if we had never known a mishap.

Waving a silent adieu to the villagers, who came forth in a body to see us depart, we turned our horses' heads down the hill, and, setting forward, soon reached the valley, crossed the stream, entered the forest, and shut the Indian village completely from our view.

“Well, Frank,” exclaimed Huntly, gayly, as with a spirited gallop we buried ourselves deeper and deeper within the forest of the valley, “this seems like old times—eh! my dear fellow?”

“It does indeed!” I replied, in the same joyous manner, as I felt the warm blood of active excitement again coursing through all my veins.

Scarcely had the words passed my lips, when our guide, who was riding in advance, suddenly drew rein, brought his horse to a halt, and exclaimed :

“She comes !”

Ere we had time to inquire who, we beheld, much to our surprise, the beautiful Prairie Flower dashing up the valley we were descending, directly in our front. Of course there were no means of avoiding her, had we designed doing so, and accordingly we rode slowly forward to meet her.

As we advanced, I could perceive that her pale features looked unusually careworn, and that her lips were compressed as if by some inward struggle to appear entirely at her ease.

As we met, she said, half in jest and half in earnest, while a slight flush tinted her cheeks and made her sweet countenance look lovely beyond description :

“Good morning, my friends ! Not running away, surely ?”

“Why,” I answered, in some confusion, “we have bidden our friends of the village a last adieu, and are, as you see, already on our journey.”

“Indeed ! you surprise me ! And could you not have deferred your departure till my return ?”

“Why, the fact is—we—that is I—we waited three days—the time mentioned by you—and as we thought—that—as you had not made your appearance—that—”

“I would not return at all,” she rejoined, completing the sentence which my embarrassment forced me to leave unfinished. “I truly grieve, my friends,” she continued, with a look of sorrowful reproach, “that, having known me so long, you should be led to doubt my word. Did I ever deceive you, that you thought I might again ?”

“Never ! never !” cried both Huntly and I in the same breath, while the conscience of each accused him of having done wrong. “But as the three days had expired,” I added, by way of justification, “and none of the villagers knew whither you had gone, we feared to tarry longer, lest the coming storms of winter should catch us on the mountains.”

“Perhaps, then, you were right, after all,” she said,

with a sigh. "True, I did not return so soon as I expected, on account of an unforeseen delay ; and though I did request you not to depart till I came back, and though I fondly relied on seeing you again, still I must admit that your promise has been faithfully kept, and that you had a perfect right to go, and I none to think you would stay to your own inconvenience."

This was said in a tone so sad, with such modest simplicity, that, knowing the true state of her feelings, and remembering that to her generous nature and untiring watchfulness and care we both owed our lives, every word sunk accusingly into my heart, and I felt condemned beyond the power of self-defense.

For a moment I knew not what or how to reply, while Prairie Flower dropped her eyes to the ground and seemed hurt to the very soul.

"Forgive us, sweet Prairie Flower !" I at length exclaimed, to the promptings of my better nature. "Forgive us both, for having done you wrong ! I cannot exonerate myself, whatever my friend may do. I had *no* right to doubt you—no right to wound your feelings by leaving in a manner so cold, so contrary to the dictates of friendship and gratitude. But still, dear Prairie Flower, if you knew all my motives, you would perhaps blame me less than you do."

She looked up at the last words, caught the expression of my eye, and seemed to comprehend my meaning at a glance ; for she colored deeply, turned aside her head, and quickly answered :

"I do not blame you. Let it pass. But whither are you bound ?"

"To Fort Laramie."

"I trust, then, I have saved you that journey."

"Indeed !" I exclaimed, in surprise, as a new idea suddenly flashed across my mind. "You have been there, then ?"

"I have."

"And all for us ?"

"Except for you I do not think I should have gone at present."

"God bless your noble, generous soul !" I cried, feel-

ing more condemned than ever. "How fortunate that we have met you, that we can at least make the slight reparation of apology and regret for having misconstrued your motives! What must have been your feelings, had you returned, your heart bounding with delight at having done us a service, and found we had repaid you by leaving in your absence, without even so much as thanks for your kindness!"

"I should have felt hurt and grieved, I must own," she answered, quietly.

"It is my fault, Prairie Flower," said Huntly, riding up to her side. "Blame me for all, and not my friend! To speak plainly, I fancied my presence was hateful to you; and that you had gone away merely to put a slight on me, by avoiding me even to the last as you had avoided me all along."

"You—you think this?" cried Prairie Flower, turning upon him a look of anguish I shall never forget, and becoming so agitated she could scarcely sit her horse. "You think this? Oh, no, no, no! you did not, could not, think I intended to insult you!" and she buried her face in her hands and shook violently.

"Great Heaven! what have I done!" cried Huntly, in alarm. "Look up, sweet Prairie Flower!—look up and forgive me! If I thought so then, I do not think so now, and God pardon me for harboring such a thought at all! But I could not understand why you avoided me, unless it was through dislike—in which case my absence would be little likely to cause a regret. I see my mistake now; and I am satisfied that, whatever your motive might have been, it was one which you at least felt to be right and pure."

"Indeed it was!" returned Prairie Flower, raising her sweet, sad face, and her soft, dark eyes to his, and then modestly dropping her gaze to the ground.

Huntly seemed about to reply, but paused and gazed silently upon Prairie Flower, who, again raising her eyes, and meeting a peculiar glance from his, blushed and turned her head quickly away.

It was evident that both were getting embarrassed, and I hastened to relieve them by saying:

"And what news from Fort Laramie, Prairie Flower? What of our friends?"

"I could learn nothing definite, save that eight only, of the sixteen with whom you went into battle, had returned; and that the rest, including yourselves, were supposed to have been killed or taken prisoners. One of the former, I think they called him an Irishman, had made great lamentations over you, declaring that the Indians or wild beasts had destroyed you."

"Poor Teddy!" I sighed; "he did indeed love us. But what became of him?"

"He left, a few days after, with a party of trappers."

"Then it may be a long time before we meet again, if ever. But do you think we can procure a regular outfit at the fort?"

"What do you require?"

"Two good horses, a brace of rifles, plenty of ammunition, and three or four buffalo skins. By the way, this reminds me that we left our possibles at the fort, stuffed with clothes, which will now be of valuable service."

"Come with me to the village," rejoined Prairie Flower, "and we will talk the matter over."

"Why, as we are so far on the way, it will only cause us unnecessary delay; besides, we have spoken our farewells to all; and turning back, when once started on a journey, is said to give bad luck."

"Yet I have but one observation to make to all your objections," returned Prairie Flower, peremptorily; "and that is, you *must* come with me!"

"If you insist on it, certainly."

"I do."

On this we turned, without more ado, and took our way back, wondering what new mystery or surprise would greet us next.

The Indians appeared more rejoiced than astonished at seeing us again, and crowded around us, and shook our hands, with as much apparent delight as if we had been absent a month.

"What is the utmost limit of your stay with us, my friends?" inquired Prairie Flower.

"An hour is the extreme," I replied.

Upon this she turned and addressed a few words to the young Indian who had volunteered to act as our guide; and then bidding us dismount and follow her, she led the way into the lodge of Great Medicine.

Making some excuse, she went out, and shortly returned, bringing with her our rifles and plenty of powder and ball.

"Now that you are going," she said, "I will restore you your arms, with a sincere prayer that, with the aid of Heaven, they may prove sufficient to preserve your lives from your natural enemies, the savages and wild beasts."

Here was another unexpected kindness, and both Huntly and myself were profuse in our thanks.

Prairie Flower then inquired the route we intended to take; and being answered that this would depend much upon circumstances, she advised us to cross the Black Hills some ten miles south of our present location, and hold our course westward over Laramie Plains, Medicine Bow Mountains, and the North Fork of Platte, to Brown's Hole on Green River, where doubtless we should find many trappers, and perhaps some of our old acquaintances—giving as a reason for directing us thus, that there would be less danger from the Indians—who, notwithstanding our signal victory at Bitter Cottonwood, still continued in parties along the regular Oregon route, killing the whites whenever they could do so without too much risk to themselves.

Thanking Prairie Flower for her advice, I replied that, having reached Fort Laramie, it would be doubtful if we returned this way: that in all probability we should join some party of emigrants; or, failing in this, take a middle course and run our risks.

"But I see no necessity for your going to Fort Laramie!" she rejoined.

"You forget, Prairie Flower, that we have no horses, and it would be foolish at least to attempt such a journey on foot."

To this she made no direct reply, but went on suggesting various things for our convenience and safety,

with as much apparent concern for our welfare as if her own life and fortunes were bound up in ours.

At length the conversation slackened; and thinking it a good opportunity, I declared that our time had expired and that we must start forthwith.

"Well, I will not detain you longer," replied Prairie Flower, leading the way out of the cabin.

To our surprise, we found at the door two beautiful steeds (not the ones we had just ridden), richly adorned with Spanish saddles, bridles and apishamores,* with two sacks of jerked meat hanging to the horns, and four large buffalo skins strapped on behind, while alongside stood the handsome pony of our fair benefactress, each and all ready for a start.

"What mean these?" I inquired, turning to Prairie Flower.

"Simply," she answered, with the utmost *naïveté*, "that you must accept from me these horses and trappings, without a word, and allow me to be your guide to the point where you will turn off to cross the mountains."

"But, Prairie Flower—"

"Not a word—not a single word—such are the conditions."

"But we have money, and—"

"Surely you would not insult me," she interrupted, "by offering to *pay*?"

I saw by her manner that to say more would only be to offend; and seizing her hand, I pressed it, with a hearty "God bless you!" while my eyes, in spite of me, became dimmed with tears.

Huntly was too deeply affected to speak at all, and therefore only pressed her hand in silence, during which the features of Prairie Flower grew very pale, and she was forced to turn aside her head to conceal her emotion.

We now comprehended all—why she had gone to Fort Laramie, and had insisted on our return with her to the village—and as we recalled her former kindness and generosity, and our own base suspicions of her inten-

* Saddle blankets of buffalo calf-skin, dressed soft.

tion to slight us, the result was to make both Huntly and myself very sad. She had her revenge, we felt, and a noble one it was too.

Mounting our horses, we again bade a silent adieu to the Mysterious Tribe, and, in company with Prairie Flower, quitted the village the second time, with more regret than the first, and took our way southward, in a direction almost opposite to our previous one.

As we rode on, I noticed that our fair guide became exceedingly abstracted ; and that, when she fancied herself unobserved, she frequently sighed. Poor girl ! she was laboring to suppress feelings, which, like the pent-up fires of a volcano, were preparing to rend the tenement which confined them ; and the very thought clouded my path with melancholy.

Huntly, too, was abstracted and silent, so that little was said on the way ; and though everything above, around and beneath, seemed conspiring to make us cheerful, yet our thoughts only rendered our hearts the more gloomy by contrast.

A ride of less than three hours brought us to a spot of the mountain that seemed of easy ascent ; when Prairie Flower drew in rein, and said, with a sigh :

“Your route lies yonder. Keep a little to the south of west, and avoid traveling after dark, or you may plunge over some precipice and be dashed to pieces.”

Huntly now appeared too agitated to reply, and it was with difficulty I could myself summon words to my aid.

“And so, dear Prairie Flower,” I at length articulated, “we are to part here?”

“I fear we must.”

“Shall we ever meet again?”

“God only knows !” she answered, trembling nervously, and dropping her eyes to the ground.

“To attempt to express our gratitude to you,” I rejoined, “would be worse than vain ; words could not speak it ; the heart alone can, and that you cannot see, only through external expressions. Of one thing, fair being, rest assured : that in the secret chambers of the souls of Francis Leighton and Charles Huntly is en-

graved a name that will never be erased—that of the noble and generous Prairie Flower !”

“Say no more—I—I—beg of you !” she gasped, waving her hand, and then placing it to her heart as if to still its wild throbbings.

“Prairie Flower,” said Huntly, in a tremulous voice, “if I part without a word you may think me ungrateful. It is not so. Do not think so ! I— Could you know this heart—”

“No more—no more !” cried the other. “I see—I know—I understand all ! Too much ! too much ! Go ! go ! I— Go ! and God’s blessing attend you both ! I—”

She paused, and grasped the mane of her beast to save herself from falling.

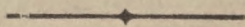
“Then farewell !” rejoined Huntly, riding up to her side and extending his hand. “You will never be forgotten by me ; and should we never meet again—then—farewell—forever !”

Prairie Flower clasped his hand, but her own trembled violently and her lips refused to reply.

The next moment, fearing doubtless the effect of a longer trial of her feelings and nerves, she turned her pony, and, signing me an adieu with her hand, dashed rapidly away, and soon disappeared from our view in the deep forest.

Huntly sighed, but made no remark, and silently and slowly we began our ascent of the mountain.

That night we slept on the brow of the Black Hills, at a point overlooking a large extent of the Laramie Plains.



CHAPTER XXI.

RENDEZVOUS OF THE TRAPPERS.



It was a beautiful morning, not far from the middle of September, that, ascending a hill, at the base of which we had encamped the night previous, we overlooked a charming green valley, completely shut in by hills, through the very centre of which, like a long line of molten silver, a bright stream took its devious course.

Not the least agreeable and enchanting to us was the sight of a few shanties, erected along the margin of the river, and the moving to and fro of several white human beings. And not the less pleasant the sight, that we had been some two weeks on a fatiguing journey of more than two hundred miles, over mountains, plains and rivers, without having seen a solitary individual except ourselves.

The valley we now beheld, the point of our present destination, was a rendezvous for the trappers, hunters and traders of this part of the country, and known as Brown's Hole.

I have not described our journey hither, after parting from Prairie Flower, as but little of interest to the general reader occurred on the route. We had had the usual fatigue of travel, an occasional escape from a fatal plunge over some precipice, and had encountered one violent storm on the Medicine Bow, which had proved far more disagreeable than dangerous.

Here, then, we were at last, in full view of what seemed to us a paradise; and a simultaneous shout of delight, not only told our feelings, but that our lungs were still in good condition.

"Well, Frank," exclaimed Huntly, with great animation, "we are now in a fair way of coming in contact with somebody besides Indians, and so let us down the mountain with all the haste possible!"

"Here goes, then, for a race!" I cried; and urging my noble animal forward, I dashed down the declivity, to the imminent danger of myself and horse, followed by Huntly in the same reckless manner, both shouting and wild with excitement.

Reaching the base of the mountain, we galloped swiftly over the valley, and brought up at last in the centre of the encampment, where curiosity soon surrounded us with a medley of various nations and complexions, all eager to learn who we were and what our business.

Here we beheld Indians of different tribes, Spaniards, Mexicans, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Creoles, Canadians, together with Anglo-Americans from all parts of the United States. Some of these were trappers, hunters, traders, *courreurs des bois* and speculators in general—all congregated here to carry on the traffic of buying and selling—this one to make money, and that one to squander his hard earnings in gambling and dissipation. Already had the trade of the season opened, although the greater part of the trappers were not as yet "in" from the mountains with their furs, pelts, and robes.

Outside of the shanties, of which there were some half a dozen—belonging, the principal one to the agent of the Hudson Bay Company, and the others to different traders—were built fires, around which groups of bronzed mountaineers were squatted, lost to all consciousness of the outer world in the exciting games of "euchre," "poker," "seven up," and so forth. In one place was meat in the process of jerking, in another skins stretched over hoops for drying, while here and there was a rude block for graining, together with various other implements used in the fur trade.

All these I noted with a hasty glance as I drew rein, and while the medley crowd was gathering around us.

I looked keenly at each as he came up, but failed to recognize a single face, much to my disappointment, as I had been rather sanguine of here finding some of my old acquaintances.

"Whar from?" asked a tall, dark, athletic mountaineer—eying us, as I fancied, a little suspiciously.

"Over the mountains," I answered.

"Whar's your traps and beavers?"

"We have none."

"Injins raise 'em?"

"We never carried any."

"Traders, hey?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Adventurers."

"That's a new callin', s'pose?"

"That is ours, at all events."

"Fine hosses you got thar."

"Very good, I believe."

"Going to stop?"

"Think we shall."

"Well, ground yourselves, put your hosses to feed, and let's see how you look."

Upon this we dismounted; and, while doing so, Huntly observed:

"I say, friend, do you know most of the trappers?"

"Know a heap—all I ever seed."

"Did you ever see one, then, called Black George?"

"D'ye ever see your own mother, stranger? Didn't I used to trap with him fifteen year ago?—and hain't I fit him out of many an Injin snap? Ef that ain't knowin' him, jest tell me what is."

"That is knowing him, certainly," returned Huntly, smiling. "But have you seen him of late?"

"Not sence two year come calf time. B'lieve he went over to the States, or some sich outlandish place or other."

"Then I have seen him since you."

"Whar d'ye leave him?" inquired the other, with interest.

"In an Indian fight at Bitter Cottonwood."

"I'd sw'ar it. When Injins is about he's always in, and a few at that, or I'm no snakes. But what become of him? Hope he didn't go under!"

"That is more than I can say, as my friend here and I were carried off from the field for dead, and have not been able to get the particulars of the battle since."

"He didn't die, I'll bet my life on that! Ef he did,

it's the fust time he ever knocked under to sich var-mints."

"I suppose, then, you have seen none who were in the fight?"

"Never hearn on't till now—so reckon I haven't."

"We fondly anticipated meeting some of them here."

"It's like you may yit; for ef they're about in this part o' creation, they're sure to come. But turn out them critters, for they looks hungry, and make yourselves at home here. And while I thinks on't, ef you've got any bacca, I'll trouble yer for a chawr."

As I had some of the desired article, I proffered it and received his warmest thanks in return.

We now set about removing our saddles and other, appendages, and hopping our horses; while the crowd, having stared at us to their satisfaction, and found nothing particularly remarkable in our persons or equipments, gradually sauntered away, until we were left entirely to ourselves.

Brown's Hole, at certain seasons of the year, becomes a place of considerable note, and presents many of the features of a western settlement on a holiday.

It was interesting to us to note the avariciousness of the traders, and the careless indifference of the trappers in disposing of their commodities.

Dropping in daily—sometimes singly, and sometimes in parties of from two to ten, loaded with pelts and furs, in value from one hundred to several thousand dollars—the latter would barter them for powder, lead, tobacco, alcohol, coffee, and whatever else they fancied, receiving each article at the most exorbitant price without uttering a word of complaint. I have seen powder sold to the mountaineers at the enormous sum of from three to four dollars a pint; alcohol at double this price, the same measure; coffee ditto; tobacco two and three dollars per plug, and everything else in proportion. Money here was out of the question, as much as if it had never been in existence—furs, pelts and robes being substituted therefor.

Here I witnessed gambling on every scale, from the lowest to the highest—from units to thousands—while

every doubtful or mooted point was sure to result in a bet before being decided.

It was nothing uncommon to see a trapper "come in" with three or four mules, and furs to the amount of several thousand dollars, and, within a week from his arrival, be without the value of a baubee he could call his own—furs, mules, rifle, everything sacrificed to his insatiable love of gambling.

The mountaineer over his cups is often quarrelsome, and an angry dispute is almost certain to be settled in an honorable way (?)—that is, rifles at thirty yards—when one or the other (sometimes both) rarely fails to pay the forfeit of his life.

I had not been many days in Brown's Hole, ere I witnessed a tragedy of this kind ; which, even now, as I recall it, makes my blood run cold with horror.

The actors in this bloody scene were two trappers of the better class, of intelligent and respectable appearance, neither of whom had seen over thirty years, and who, as a general thing, were of very sober and quiet habits. They were from the same part of the country, had been boys together, had started together upon their adventures and perilous occupation, and were moreover sworn *friends*.

Some three days after our arrival they made their appearance, well packed with pelts and furs, which they immediately proceeded to dispose of to the traders. As their trip had been an unusually profitable one, they of course felt much elated, and, taking a drink together, sat down to a friendly game of cards, to while away their leisure hours. More strict in their habits than most of their associates, they rarely gambled, and then only for diversion.

On the occasion alluded to, they at once began playing for liquor ; and having at length drank more than their wont, they proceeded to stake different articles.

As the game progressed, they became more and more excited, until at last their stakes ran very high.

One was peculiarly fortunate, and of course the luck of the other was exactly the reverse, which so mortified

and vexed him that he finally staked all his hard earnings and lost.

On this his companion took another drink, grew more and more merry at his own success, which he attributed to his superior skill in handling the cards, and finally bantered the other to put up his mules.

No sooner said than done, and the result was the same as before.

He was now, to use the phrase of some of the bystanders, who had crowded around the two to watch the game, "Purty wall cleaned out." He had staked all, and lost all, and was of course rendered not a little desperate by the circumstances.

"Why don't you bet your body fixins?" cried one.

Like a drowning man at a straw, he caught at the idea, and the next moment he and his companion were deciding the ownership of his costume by a game of euchre.

As might have been supposed, the result was against him, and he was at last completely beggared. Seizing the half-emptied can of liquor by his side, he drained it at a draught, and in a tone of frenzy cried:

"Somebody lend me somethin'! I must have my fixins back!"

"Luck's agin ye now," answered one. "Better wait till another time."

"No! now—now—now!" he fairly screamed. "I'll show Jim yet that I'm his master at cards any day he darn pleases! Who'll lend me somethin', I say?"

None seemed inclined, however, to assist one so signally unfortunate; and having waited a sufficient time, and finding his appeal likely to prove fruitless, the disappointed man rose, and in a great passion swore he would leave "such outlandish diggins and the heathenish set that inhabited them."

"Whar'll ye go?" asked his companion, in unusual glee.

"Whar no such scamps as you can find me!"

"But afore you leave I s'pose you'll pay your debts?" retorted the other.

"What debts?"

"Didn't I jest win your body fixins?"

"Wall, do you claim them, too? I thought as how you'd got enough without them."

"Claim all my property wharever I can find it!" returned the other, more in jest than earnest. "Of course, ef you're goin' to leave, so as I won't see you agin, I can't afford to trust."

"You're a villain!" cried the loser, turning fiercely upon his friend: "a mean, dirty, villainous thief, and a liar!"

"Come, come, Sam—them's hard words!" replied the one called Jim, in a mood of some displeasure.

"Wall, they're true, you know it, and you darn't resent 'em!"

"Thunder and fury!" cried the other, his eyes flashing fire, and his whole frame trembling with a newly-roused passion; "I dar' and will resent 'em, at any time and place you please!"

"The time's now, then, and the place hereabouts."

"And what the way?"

"Rifles—thirty paces."

"Enough!" and both proceeded to get their rifles and arrange themselves upon the ground—a spot some forty yards distant from the encampment—whither they were followed by a large crowd, all eager to be witnesses of a not uncommon, though often bloody, scene, as was the case in the present instance.

Selecting a level spot, the parties in question placed themselves back to back; and then, having examined their rifles, each marched forward fifteen paces, and wheeled face to his antagonist.

Sam then called out:

"All ready?"

"Ready!" was the reply.

"Somebody give the word, then!" returned the first speaker, and at the same instant both rifles were brought to the faces of the antagonists.

For a moment a breathless silence succeeded, which was broken by the distinct, but dreadful, word:

"Fire!"

Scarcely was it uttered, when crack went both rifles

at once; and bounding up from the earth, with a yell of pain, Sam fell back a corpse, pierced through the brain by the bullet of his friend.

Jim was unharmed, though the ball of the other had passed through his hat and grazed the top of his head.

Dropping his rifle, with a look of horror that haunts me still, he darted forward, and was the first to reach the side of the dead.

Bending down, he raised the body in his arms, and, wiping the blood from its face with his hands, called out, in the most endearing and piteous tones:

"Sam! Sam!—look up!—speak to me!—it's Jim—your friend. I did not go to do it! I was mad, or drunk! Sam! Sam! speak to me!—for Heaven's sake, speak, if only once, and say you forgive me! Sam, why don't you speak? Oh! I shall go distracted! My brain seems on fire! You know, dear Sam, I wouldn't murder you—you—my friend—my dearly loved friend—the playmate of my childhood! Oh, speak! speak! speak! Oh, God! speak, Sam, if only once! It was the cursed liquor that done it. Oh, speak! if only to curse me! Oh, God! oh, God! he don't answer me!" cried the wretched man, turning an agonized, imploring look upon the spectators, as if they could give him aid, and then wildly straining the dead man to his heart.

"He'll never speak agin!" said one.

"Oh, no! don't say that!" shrieked the duellist; "don't say that! or I shall go mad! I feel it here—here—in my head—in my brain! I killed him, did I? I killed him—murdered him—the only friend I had on earth? And you all stood and seen me do it! Yes, I murdered him! See! see! thar's blood—his blood—I did it—ha, ha, ha!" and he ended with a maniacal laugh, threw himself upon the ground, and hugged the corpse of his friend to his heart.

"Poor feller!" said one; "he'd better be took into one o' the lodges, for he looks like he'd lost his senses."

"No, no, no! you shan't—you shan't part us!" cried the frenzied man, drawing his dead companion closer to his heart, as some of the party sought to carry out the suggestion just made. "No, no! you shan't part us—never,

never, never! This is Sam, this is—Sam Murdoch—he's my friend—and we're goin' a long journey together—ain't we, Sam? We'll never part agin—will we, Sam? Never! never!—oh, never!—ha, ha, ha! Thar! thar!" he continued, dropping the body, rising to a sitting posture, and staring wildly at some imaginary object: "I see, Sam—I see! You're in great danger. That rock's about to fall. But hang on, Sam—hang on to that root! Don't let go! Jim's a-comin'. Oh, God! who put that chasm thar—that mountain gorge—to separate us? I can't git across. Help! help! or Sam will die! Yes, he's fallin' now! Thar! thar! he's goin'—down—down—down! But here's one will meet you, Sam. Comin'! comin'!" and whipping out his knife as he said this, before any one was aware what he was about, or had time to prevent him, he plunged it into his heart, and, gasping the word "comin'," rolled over upon the earth and expired beside his friend.

I had been a silent witness of the whole bloody, terrible scene—but my feelings can neither be imagined nor described. Speechless with horror, I stood and gazed like one in a trance, without the power to move, and was only roused from my painful reverie by Huntly, who touched me on the shoulder and said:

"Come away, Frank—come away!"

Complying with his request, I turned, and together we quitted the ground, both too deeply affected and horrified at what we had seen to make a single comment.

The mountaineers, with whom such and similar scenes were of common occurrence, proceeded to deposit the dead in a rude grave near the spot where they had fallen.

They then returned to the encampment, to take a drink to their memories, coolly talk over the "sad mishap," as they termed it, and again to engage in their usual routine of amusement or occupation.

In a week the whole affair was forgotten, or mentioned only to some new-comer as having happened "some time ago."

Upon the minds of myself and friend it produced an impression never to be erased; and, for a long time

after the event, apparitions of the unfortunate trappers haunted my waking senses by day and my dreams by night.

CHAPTER XXII.

A PERILOUS JOURNEY.



WE had been a month in Brown's Hole, without having seen or heard anything concerning our old acquaintances—during which time another mountaineer had been the victim of a quarrel, though his death we did not witness—when I proposed to Huntly to set forward at once, and leave a place so little adapted to our tastes and feelings.

"But where do you propose going, Frank?" inquired my friend.

"To California."

"But can we find the way by ourselves?"

"We shall hardly find a place less to our liking than this, at all events," I replied.

"But we are safe here, Frank."

"I presume Charles Huntly does not fear danger, or he would not have ventured westward at all?"

"Enough, Frank! Say no more! I am your man. But when shall we start?"

"What say you for to-morrow morning?"

"Agreed. But perhaps we can hire a guide?"

"We will try," I rejoined.

But our trial proved fruitless. No guide could be found, whose love of money would tempt him at this season of the year, to undertake the conducting of us to California; while on every hand we were assailed by the mountaineers with the most startling accounts of dangers from Indians, from snow, from floods, from storms, and from starvation.

"You never can fetch through!" said one. "It's a fixed impossibility."

"You're fools ef you undertake it!" joined in another.

"It's like jumpin' on to rocks down a three hundred foot precipice, and 'spectin' to git off without no bones broke!" rejoined a third.

"Ef you knows what's safe, you'll jest keep your eyes open and not leave these here diggins," added a fourth.

But these remarks, instead of discouraging us, produced exactly the opposite effect, and roused our ambition to encounter the formidable dangers of which all were so eager to warn us. To Huntly and myself there appeared something bold and manly in attempting what all seemed to dread; and to each and all I accordingly replied:

"It is useless, gentlemen, trying to discourage us. We have decided on going, and go we shall, at all hazards."

"All I've got to say then is, that it'll be the last goin' you'll do in this world!" rejoined the friend of Black George, who seemed uncommonly loth to part with us.

The next morning rose clear and cold—for the air in this part of the country had become quite frosty—and, agreeably to our resolve of the preceding day, we equipped ourselves and horses once more, bade our mountaineer friends adieu, and set forward in fine spirits—shaping our course, to the best of our judgment, so as to strike the southern range of the Bear River Mountains, in the vicinity of the Utah Lake, which connects with the Great Salt Lake on the north.

To give our progress in detail, would only be to describe a succession of scenes, incidents and perils, similar to those already set before the reader, and take up time and space which the necessity of the case requires me to use for a more important purpose. I shall, therefore, content myself with sketching some of the most prominent and startling features of our route—a route sufficiently full of perils, as we found to our cost, to put to the test the temerity and try the iron constitution of the boldest and most hardy adventurer.

While in Brown's Hole, we had succeeded in pur-

chasing of one of the traders, at a high price, a map and compass, which he had designed especially for his own use, and similar to those we had provided ourselves with on starting, but which, together with many other valuable articles, had been left in our possible sacks at Fort Laramie.

On our compass and map we now placed our whole dependence, as our only guide over a vast region of unexplored country—or explored only by a few traders, trappers and Indians—Fremont's celebrated expedition, which created at the time such universal interest throughout the United States, not having been made till some three or four years subsequent to the date of which I am writing.

And here, *en passant*, I would remark, that in determining our course for California, we had particular reference to the southern portion of it; for as every reader knows, who is acquainted with the geography of the country, or who has taken the trouble to trace our route on the map, we were already within the north-eastern limits prescribed to this mighty territory.

Leaving the delightful valley of Brown's Hole, we dashed swiftly onward in a southwesterly direction; and our horses being in fine traveling order, we were enabled to pass over a long stretch of beautiful country, and camp at the close of day on the banks of a stream known as Ashley's Fork.

Crossing this the next morning, we continued on the same course as the day previous, and night found us safely lodged in the Uintah Fort—a solitary trading post in the wilderness—which was then garrisoned by Spaniards and Canadians, with a sprinkling of several other nations, together with Indian women, wives of the traders and hunters, who comprised the whole female department.

Here we sought to procure a guide; but with the same success as before—not one caring to risk his life by an experiment so fool-hardy as undertaking a journey of many hundred miles, with a force so small, over a pathless region of territory, either peopled not at all or by hostile tribes of savages.

The accounts we received from all quarters of the dangers before us, were certainly enough to have intimidated and changed the designs of any less venturesome than we, and less firmly fixed in a foolish determination to push to the end what at best could only be termed a wild, boyish freak. But, as I said before, our ambition was roused to perform what all were afraid to dare ; and we pressed onward, as reckless of consequences as though we knew our lives especially guaranteed to us for a term of years beyond the present by a Power from on high. I have often since looked back upon this period, and shuddered at the thought of what we then dared ; and I can now only account for our temerity, our indifference to the warnings we received, as resulting from a species of insanity.

A travel of some two or three days brought us to the stream called the Spanish Fork ; and pushing down this, through a wild gorge in the Wahsatch Mountains, we encamped the day following on its broad, fertile bottoms, near its junction with, and in full view of, the Utah Lake.

We were now in the country of the Utahs, a tribe of Indians particularly hostile to small parties of whites, and the utmost caution was necessary to avoid falling into their clutches. On either hand, walling the valley on the right and left, rose wild, rugged, frowning cliffs, and peaks of mountains, lifting their heads far heavenward, covered with eternal snows.

At this particular spot was good grazing for our horses ; but judging by the appearance of the country around us, and the information we had received from the mountaineers, we were about to enter a sterile region, with little or no vegetation—in many places devoid of water and game (our main dependence for subsistence)—peopled, if at all, by the Diggers only—an animal of the human species the very lowest in the scale of intellect—in fact scarcely removed from the brute creation—who subsist upon what few roots, lizards and reptiles they can gather from the mountains—sometimes in small parties of three and four, and sometimes in numbers—and who, being perfect cannibals in their habits, would not fail to destroy us if possible, if for nothing else than to feast

upon our carcasses. Take into consideration, too, our education—our luxurious habits through life—our inability to contend with numbers—that the only benefit we could derive from our expedition would be in satisfying our boyish love of adventure—and I think even the most reckless will be free to pronounce our undertaking foolhardy in the extreme.

So far we had been very fortunate in avoiding the savages; but from all appearances we could not do so much longer; and what would be the result of our meeting them God only could know. We were now on the borders of the Great Interior Basin, a region of country containing thousands on thousands of square miles, which had never yet been explored by a white man, perhaps by no living being! Should we make the attempt to cross it? We could but lose our lives at the worst, and we might perchance succeed, and find a nearer route to Western or Southern California than the one heretofore traveled. There was something inspiring in the thought; and the matter was discussed in our lone camp, in the dead hours of night, with no little animation.

“What say you, Frank?” cried Huntly, the next morning, rousing me from a sweet dream of home. “Westward? or southward?”

“Why,” I replied, “there is danger in either choice—so choose for yourself.”

“Well, I am for exploring this region left blank on the map.”

“Then we will go, live or die,” I rejoined; “for I long myself to behold what has never as yet been seen by one of my race.”

The matter thus decided, we mounted our horses, and, keeping to the south of the Utah Lake, crossed a small stream, and about noon came to a halt on the brow of a high hill, forming a portion of the Wahsatch range. Below us, facing the west, we beheld a barren tract of land, with here and there a few green spots, and an occasional stream sparkling in the bright sunlight, which led us to believe there might be oases, at intervals of a day's ride, across the whole Great Basin, to the foot of the Sierra Nevada or Snow Range, which divides it

from the pleasant valleys of the Sacramento and San Joaquin.

It was a delightful day, and everything before us, even the most sterile spots, looked enchanting in the soft, mellow light.

Descending the mountain with not a little difficulty, we set forward across the plain, shaping our course to the nearest point likely to afford us a good encampment. But the distance was much further than we had anticipated when viewing it from the mountain; and although we urged our beasts onward as much as they could bear, night closed around us long before we reached it.

Reach it we did at last; and heartily fatigued with our day's work, we hopped our horses, and, without kindling a fire, or eating a morsel of food, rolled ourselves in our robes of buffalo and fell asleep.

The sun of the succeeding morning, shining brightly in our faces, awoke us; and, springing to our feet, we gazed around with mingled sensations of awe and delight. Doubtless we felt, in a small degree, the emotions excited in the breast of the adventurer, when for the first time he finds himself on ground which he fancies has never yet been trod nor seen by a stranger. We had entered a country now which the most daring had feared or failed to explore, and we felt a noble pride in the thought that we should be the first to lay before the world its mysteries.

The point where we had encamped was green and fertile, abounding with what is termed buffalo grass, with trees unlike any I had before seen, and with wild flowers innumerable. Like an island from the ocean, it rose above the desert around it, covering an area of a mile in circumference, and was watered by several bright springs.

Turning our gaze to the eastward, we beheld the snowy peaks of the Wahsatch Mountains, which we had left behind us, looming up in grandeur; while to the westward, nothing was visible but an unbroken, barren, pathless desert. Here was certainly a prospect anything but charming—yet not for a moment did we waver in our determination to press onward.

It will be remembered, that, on leaving the village of the Mysterious Nation, Prairie Flower had taken care to furnish us a good supply of jerked meat; and this, by killing more or less game on our route, we had been enabled to retain in our possession, to be eaten only in cases of extreme necessity; consequently we did not fear suffering for food so much as for water; and even the latter we were sanguine of finding ere anything serious should occur. The only matter that troubled us sorely, was the fear that our noble animals would not be as fortunate as ourselves, and that starvation might compel them to leave their bones in the wilderness, and thereby oblige us to pursue our journey on foot—an event, as the reader will perceive, far more probable than agreeable.

As we had eaten nothing the previous night, we now felt our appetites much sharpened. Looking around, in the hope of discovering game, my eye chanced upon a rabbit. The next moment the sharp crack of my rifle broke upon the solitude and the little fellow lay dead in his tracks.

Hastily dressing him and kindling a fire, we were already in the act of toasting the meat, when whiz-z-z came a dozen arrows through the air, some of them actually penetrating our garments without wounding us, and others burying themselves in the ground at our feet. Springing up, with a cry of alarm, we grasped our rifles, though only one was loaded, and turned to look for the enemy.

Upon a steep bluff, some thirty paces behind us, we beheld some fifteen or twenty small, dirty, miserable-looking savages, with their bows and arrows in their hands, already in the act of giving us another volley.

“Frank,” cried Huntly, “it is all over with us now.”

“Never say die to such inferior rascals!” I rejoined, more vexed than alarmed. “Quick! Charley—dodge behind this tree! and while I load, be sure you bring one of them to his last account!”

While speaking I ran, followed by my friend; and scarcely had we gained shelter, when whiz-z-z came an-

other flight of arrows, some of them actually piercing the tree behind which we stood.

“Quick! Charley—they are looking toward our horses! (These were feeding within ten paces of us.) There! they are on the point of shooting them! Take the leader! For Heaven’s sake don’t miss—or we are lost!”

As I spoke, the rifle of my friend belched forth its deadly contents; and the foremost of our foes, who was just on the point of discharging an arrow at one of the horses, shot it at random, and, with a loud yell, fell headlong down the bluff, and was dashed to pieces on the rocks below. Several others had their bows drawn; but on the fall of their companion they also fired at random, and, approaching the bluff, gazed down upon his mangled remains, uttering frantic yells of rage and grief.

By this time my own rifle was loaded, and, taking a hasty aim, I tumbled a second after the first. The savages were now alarmed in earnest; and retreating several paces, they just made their faces visible, apparently undecided whether to retire or attack us in a body. This was an important moment; but fortunately for us the rifle of Huntly was now again loaded; and taking a more careful sight than before, he lodged the ball in the head of a third. This created a terrible panic among our enemies, who fled precipitately.

Now was our chance, and perhaps our only chance, to escape; for we knew nothing of the number of our foes, nor at what moment they might return with an overwhelming force. Calling to Huntly, I darted to my horse and cut the tether-rope with my knife; and so rapidly did both of us work, that in three minutes we were in our saddles and galloping away.

As we turned the southern point of this desert island, we heard an ominous succession of yells, and, some forty rods away to the right, beheld a band of at least fifty Indians, of both sexes, together with some twenty miserable huts. This was evidently their village; and, from what we could judge, they were preparing to renew

the attack, as we had feared, when our appearance apprised them of our escape.

To the best of our judgment they were Diggers, and on this oasis dragged out their miserable existence. Being divided from us by a ridge, neither party had been aware of the proximity of the other until the discharge of my rifle at the rabbit. This, it appears, had alarmed them and excited an immediate attack, from the fatal consequences of which kind Heaven had so providentially delivered us.

We thought seriously of giving them a parting salute—particularly as they seemed to grieve so much for our departure—but on second consideration concluded we would reserve our powder and ball, not knowing how necessary to self-preservation these might yet become; and so, taking off our hats and waving them a kind farewell, we dashed away over the plain.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TERRIBLE DESERT.



OUR progress through the day was over an arid waste of calcareous formation, devoid of all vegetation, with the exception of a few tall, stiff, wire-like weeds, that grew here and there where the soil appeared a little moist and loamy. Deep ravines, or cracks in the earth, in some places to the depth of it might be a thousand feet, cut across the ground in every direction, and rendered everything like speed, or traveling after night, out of the question.

These gullies, when very narrow, we forced our horses to leap—but frequently we had to ride around them—on account of which our progress westward was slow and tedious.

The sun here seemed at least twenty degrees warmer than on the highlands we had left behind us; and not having come to any water, we began about mid-day to feel the oppression of a burning thirst; while our well-fed and well-watered animals of the morning, showed alarming signs of experiencing the same sensation, by lolling their tongues, occasionally smelling the earth, and snuffing the dry air. Oh! what would we not have given, even then, for a bucket of water, cool from some deep well!

We found no place to noon, and consequently were forced to push forward, in the hope of reaching an oasis for our night's encampment.

On, on we went, our thirst increasing to a great degree, while the sun rolled slowly down toward the west, and yet nothing around and before us but this same dull, arid waste.

We now began to experience the effects of our rashness, and, if truth must be told, to secretly wish ourselves safely clear of our undertaking, though neither breathed a word to the other of the thoughts passing in his mind. Our horses, too, seemed very much fatigued, and required considerable spurring to hasten them forward.

The sun had now sunk within an hour of the horizon, and yet the same cheerless prospect lay before us. We looked back, and, far in the distance, like a mole-hill, could faintly trace the outline of the oasis of our last encampment; while beyond that the snowy peaks of the Wahsatch glistened in the sunbeams. Advancing a couple of miles, we found ourselves compelled to camp for the night, without water and with nothing for our horses to eat.

"What is to be done?" asked Huntly. "We cannot long exist without water; and our poor beasts are already suffering to an alarming degree, and will not be likely to hold out more than one day more at the most."

"Well, I fancy by that time we shall come to a spot similar to the one behind us."

"Then you think we had better go forward?"

"I dislike the idea of turning back. Besides, we

should probably fall into the hands of the savages, and death here looks full as tempting as there."

"But our horses, Frank—poor beasts! see how they suffer!"

"I know it, and would to Heaven I could relieve them! But we cannot even help ourselves."

"Do you think they can go through another day like this?"

"I am unable to say."

"Oh! it would be awful to be put afoot in this desert!"

"By no means a pleasant matter, I must own. But, my friend, this is no time to get alarmed. We have set out, after being duly warned, and must therefore make the most of the circumstances we have brought upon ourselves. If our horses die, we must use their blood to quench our thirst."

"Heavens, Frank," exclaimed Huntly, startled with a new idea, "what if another day's travel like this should still leave us in the bare desert with no haven in sight?"

"Why, I should consider our case nearly hopeless; but we will trust to having better fortune."

We now ate some of our meat, but with little relish, and, throwing ourselves upon the earth, at length fell into a kind of feverish slumber. A dew fell during the night which refreshed us in some degree.

At the first streak of daylight we were again in our saddles, and found, much to our relief, that although our poor beasts had not eaten a morsel since the morning previous, they, like ourselves, were considerably invigorated by a night of repose.

Setting forward again, as cheerfully as the circumstances would permit, we traveled some two or three hours at a fast amble; but now the sun began to be felt rather sensibly, and our beasts to flag and droop, while our sensations of thirst seemed increased ten-fold. If this was the case in the morning, what would be the result ere another night? We shuddered at the thought.

About noon the appearance of the ground began to change for the worse, which in spite of ourselves was productive of no little alarm.

Gradually it became more and more sandy ; and an hour's further progress brought us to a desert more barren than ever, where not a living thing, vegetable or animal, could be seen, over a dreary expanse, that, for all we knew, might be hundreds of miles in extent.

To add to the horrors of our situation, our horses were evidently on the point of giving out—for as they buried their feet in the white, hot sand, they occasionally reeled and seemed inclined to lie down—while our own throats, lips and tongues began to swell, and the skin of our faces and hands to blister and crack. I recalled to mind the accounts I had read of bones being found in the great Arabian desert, and I fancied that many years hence some more fortunate traveler might so discover ours.

Cheering each other as well as we could, we kept on for another hour, when the horse of Huntly reeled, dropped upon his knees, and fell over upon his side.

"Oh, God !" cried my friend, in despair ; "we are lost !—we are lost !—and such a death !"

"Our last hope is here !" I rejoined, dismounting and plunging my knife into the dying beast ; and as the warm blood spouted forth, we placed our parched lips to it, and drank with a greediness we had never felt nor displayed for anything before.

This gave us no little relief for the time, and added vigor to our already drooping and weakened frames. But what could it avail us ? It might relieve us now—might prolong our lives for a few hours—only to go through the same terrible tortures and find death at last. Unless we could reach a spring by another day's travel, or come in sight of one, our case was certainly hopeless ; and to carry us forward we now had nothing to depend on but our own limbs and strength, while our path must be over a bed of hot, loose sand, where every step would be buried ankle deep.

"Well, Frank," sighed Huntly, at length, "what are we to do now ? I suppose we may as well die here as elsewhere."

"No—not here, my friend ; we will make one trial more at least."

"And have we any prospect, think you, of saving our lives? of seeing another green spot?"

"Why, you remember, when on the Wahsatch, we saw some hills away in the distance; and unless it was an optical illusion, I have a faint hope of being able to reach them before this time to-morrow."

"God grant it, my friend!—for though I fear not death more than another, there is something horrible in the thought of leaving my bones here in the wilderness."

"Well, well—cheer up, Huntly! and trust in Providence to carry us safely through."

A further consultation resulted in the decision to await the night, and, if my horse should prove able to proceed, to let him carry our sacks, rifles, and so forth, while we were to keep him company on foot.

By the time the sun had fairly set we resumed our journey; but after a laborious travel of half a mile, my horse gave out. Taking from him a portion of the jerked meat, our rifles, and such small articles as we could not well do without, I killed him, to end his misery, with many a sigh of regret.

It was a clear, starlight night, and the air just cool enough to be comfortable; but, unlike the preceding one, we no longer had the refreshing dew to moisten our bodies and renew our strength.

Still we succeeded better than I had anticipated, and, by exertions almost superhuman, placed many a long mile between us and our starting point ere the first crimson streak in the east told us that day was again dawning.

To add hope to our drooping spirits, we now found the ground becoming more and more solid; and ere the sun peered over the mountains, which were almost lost to view in the distance, we set our feet once more upon hard earth, similar in appearance to that we had quitted for the sands.

Struggling on a mile or two further, we ascended a slight elevation, and, joy inexpressible, beheld, far away before us, a ridge of green hills.

All the extravagant, unspeakable delight of the poor,

shipwrecked mariner, who has been for days tossed about by the angry elements, without food to save him from starvation, without water to slake his consuming thirst, on beholding, in the last agonies of despair, the green hills of his native land suddenly loom up before him—all his unspeakable emotions, I say, were ours; and silently dropping upon our knees, our hearts spoke the gratitude to our All-wise Preserver which our tongues were unable to utter. True, the famished, worn-out mariner might die in sight of land—and so might we in view of our haven of rest—yet the bare hope of reaching it alive gave energy to our sinking spirits and strength to our failing limbs.

Again we pressed forward, our now swollen and bloodshot eyes fixed eagerly upon the desired spot, which, like an *ignis-fatuus*, seemed only to recede to our advance.

The sun, too, gradually rolling higher and higher, till it reached the zenith of its glory and began to descend toward the west, poured down its scorching rays (for they seemed scorching to us in the desert), dried up, as it were, the very marrow of our bones, blistered our parched and feverish skins, and caused our limbs to swell, till every step became one of pain almost unbearable. All our previous sufferings were as nothing, seemingly, compared to our present; and when we reached the bank of a stream, which wound around the base of the hills, the sun had already hid itself for the day, and we sunk down completely exhausted!

Huntly, for the last two or three miles, had become delirious—had often raved about home, which he declared was just below him in a pool of clear water, which he, being chained to a rock, was not permitted to reach, although dying of thirst—and had often turned to me, with much the look of a ravenous beast about to spring upon his prey—so that, with the greatest difficulty, in my then weak state, I had succeeded in getting him to the stream, where, as I have said, we both sunk down in a state of exhaustion.

Had the stream been a mile, or even half a mile,

further off, we must both have perished in sight of that water which alone could save us.

Weak and worn-out as I was, I still had my senses—though sometimes I fancied they were beginning to wander—and I knew that for either to indulge his appetite freely would be certain to produce death.

As my friend seemed too feeble to move, and as I was in a little better condition—though now unable to walk—I crawled over the ground to the stream, which was not deep, and rolled into it, restraining myself even then from tasting a drop, until my body was thoroughly soaked and I felt considerably revived.

After a bath of some five minutes, I took a few draughts of the sparkling element, and never in my life experienced such a powerful and speedy change for the better. Almost instantly I felt the life-renewing blood coursing through my veins, and I came out of the water as it were another being.

Hastening to my friend, I partially raised him in my arms, and, dragging him to the stream, tumbled him in, taking care to keep a firm hold. In a few minutes I had the satisfaction of seeing him slowly revive. Then scooping up the water with my hand, I placed it to his lips, and he drank eagerly. Gradually his strength and consciousness returned, and, with feelings which none but one in my situation can ever know, I at length heard him exclaim :

“Water ! water ! Thank God ! Frank, we are saved !” and falling upon the breast of each other, overcome with emotions of joy, our tears of gratitude were borne away upon the river which laved our feet.

Eating sparingly, ever moistening our food, we at last found our former strength much restored ; and, fording the stream, we threw ourselves upon the grassy earth, and slept soundly that night upon its western bank.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ANOTHER LONG, PERILOUS JOURNEY.



N the following morning we found our limbs so stiff and sore as scarcely to be able to move about.

With great difficulty we gained the river, and bathed ourselves in its cool, refreshing waters, as on the evening previous. The result of this seemed very beneficial; but still we suffered too much from our recent almost superhuman exertions to think of leaving our present locality for a day or two at least.

Looking back over the desert which had nearly cost us our lives, we could barely perceive the shadowy outline of some of the highest peaks of the Bear River and Wahsatch Mountains; but not a trace of that ridge on which we had stood before entering this unexplored territory, from whence we had beheld distant oases and streams, none of which, save the first, had been found on our route.

How this could be, was a matter of serious speculation, until Huntly suggested the fact of our having looked more to the southward than westward. His observation struck me quite forcibly; for I now remembered having examined our compass, shortly after leaving the Indians, and of altering our course to the right.

This then solved the mystery! We had come due west, instead of west by south, and consequently had missed the very points we thought before us, and which would have saved the lives of our poor beasts.

For two days we remained on the bank of the stream, which we not inappropriately named Providence Creek, without venturing away the distance of thirty yards during the whole time.

On the morning of the third day, we found our limbs so pliable, and our strength so far recruited, as to think

ourselves justified in resuming our travels, or at all events in making an exploration of the ridge above us.

Accordingly, ascending to the summit of the hill, which was densely covered with a wood somewhat resembling ash, though not so large, we made out the uplands here to cover an area of five miles in breadth, by twenty in length, running almost due north and south, and composed of two parallel ridges, full of springs of fine water.

Our present locality was a rich and beautiful desert island; and had our horses been here, they would have fared sumptuously on the green, luxuriant grass of the valley.

To the best of our judgment, this spot had never before been visited by human being, as no signs indicative thereof could be found. The only game we could discover were a few ground animals resembling the rabbit, and some gay plumed birds. We killed a few of each, and, on dressing and cooking them, found their flavor, especially the former, very delicious and nutritive.

In this manner we spent a week on Mount Hope, as we termed the ridge, making explorations, killing game, and so forth, and at the end of this time found our wonted health and spirits nearly restored. We knew not what was before us, it is true; but as kind Providence had almost miraculously preserved us through so many dangers, we no longer had dread of our journey, nor fears of our safely reaching the valley of the Sacramento, at which point we aimed.

One thing in our rambles struck us quite forcibly—that in the beds of some of the streams we examined, we found a substance, mixed with the dirt and sands, which had the appearance of gold. As we had no means of testing this, we resolved to take some along as a specimen, and, should we escape, and our surmises regarding it be confirmed, either return ourselves, or put some hardy adventurer in possession of the secret.

The next morning, like each of the preceding, being clear and serene, we resolved to depart and again try our fortunes.

Looking toward the west, we beheld in the distance

another camping ground ; and hastening down the western slope of the hills, we made our way directly toward it, over a slightly undulating country, less sterile in its appearance than the desert we had crossed the previous week.

We were not able to reach it till nightfall, and suffered more or less through the day for want of water.

Here we again found a rich soil, wooded with what I believe is termed the sage tree, and watered by several delightful springs and streams, in some of which we bathed, and of which we drank, much to our relief.

To follow up our progress in detail, would be to take up more space than can now be spared for the purpose, and, in a great measure, to repeat, with trifling variations, what I have already given.

Suffice it, therefore, that our journey was continued day after day ; sometimes over sandy deserts of two days' travel, which blistered our feet, and where we again suffered all the horrors of burning thirst ; sometimes over rough, dangerous and volcanic grounds, alongside of giddy precipices, and yawning chasms, and adown steep declivities, where a single misstep would have been fatal ; sometimes across streams too deep to ford, and which we were obliged to swim ; subsisting, a part of the way, on roots and such game as we could kill (our supply of jerk having given out), and sleeping at night on the sands, in the open air, or perhaps under the shelter of some overhanging rock ; occasionally drenched with a storm of cold rain, without a fire to dry our wet garments, and suffering more or less from hunger, and thirst, and weariness, and violent rheumatic pains.

Such was our pilgrimage over an unexplored country ; and yet through all our sufferings, save the first, when we lost our horses, our spirits were almost ever buoyant, and we experienced a rapturous delight known only to the adventurer.

Some six weeks from our leaving the Wahsatch range, we came in sight of the lofty peaks of the Sierra Nevada, which we hailed with a shout of joy, similar to that of a sailor discovering land after a long, tedious

voyage, and which awoke echoes in a wilderness never before disturbed by the human voice.

Five hundred miles of an unknown region had been passed over, almost the whole distance on foot. During this time we had not seen a human being—always excepting our unfortunate friends, the Diggers—which led us to the inference, that the larger portion of this Great Interior Basin was uninhabited—or, at all events, very thinly peopled.

From this point to the Sierra Nevada, our course now lay over a rough, mountainous country, well watered and timbered. On the second day we came upon one or two miserable, dilapidated huts, which from all appearance had long been untenanted; and, a mile or two further on, we saw a small party of savages, who, on discovering our approach, fled precipitately to the highlands, we probably being the first white human beings they had ever beheld.

About noon of the third day we came to a beautiful lake, and, going round it, reached the foot of the mountain chain, bounding the Great Basin on the west, just as the sun, taking his diurnal farewell of the snowy peaks above us, seemingly transformed them, by his soft, crimson light, into huge pillars of burnished gold.

We now considered ourselves comparatively safe, though by no means out of danger; for our route, over these mighty erections of nature, we were well aware, must be one of extreme peril. Unlike the desert, we might not suffer for want of water; but, unlike the desert too, we might with cold, snows, storms, and from hostile savages.

On the succeeding day we began our ascent. Up, up, up we toiled, through dense thickets of dwarfish, shrubby trees—through creeping vines, full of brambles, that lacerated our ankles and feet (we had long been shoeless); up, up, up the steep mountain sides we struggled, over rocks which sometimes formed precipices that only yielded us here and there a dangerous foothold; occasionally leaping across cañons, in which the torrent of the mountain rolled murmuring over its rocky bed a thousand feet below us: on, on, up and on,

we pressed eagerly—sometimes suffering with fatigue, and with cold, and with hunger : up and on we bent our steps, for two, long, wearisome days, ere we reached the regions of eternal snow.

At last we stood upon the very backbone of the Sierra Nevada, ten thousand feet above the level of the sea, surrounded by a few cedars, loaded with snow and ice—the former underneath us to the depth of many feet—and gazed downward, far, far below us, upon the broad, barren plains, fertile uplands, lovely valleys, and bright, silver streams and lakes, with feelings that no language can describe.

A mile or two further on we came to a pleasant valley, through which rolled a beautiful stream. Here, collecting a supply of driftwood, we kindled a bright fire, and, disposing ourselves around it, toasted our already swollen and frost-bitten feet, made our supper of a few roots and berries which we had collected on the way, and occupied most of the night in constructing some rude moccasins out of a quarter buffalo robe which we fortunately had brought with us.

Thus for several days did we continue our perilous journey—passing through scenes of danger and hardship, that, if detailed, would fill a volume—sustained, in all our trials, by a holy Being, to whom we daily and nightly gave the sincere orisons of grateful hearts.

Once, during our mountain journey, we came very nigh being buried in a furious snow-storm ; and but for the providential shelter of an Indian hut, ere darkness settled around us, this narrative in all probability would never have been written.

The hut in question stood on the side of the mountain, and was constructed of sticks, willows and rushes, well braided together, in shape not unlike a modern beehive. The tenants were an Indian, his squaw, and two half-grown children, all miserable and filthy in their appearance.

Our sudden entrance (for we did not stop for etiquette) alarmed them terribly, and they screeched and drew back, and huddled themselves in a far corner.

However, on making them friendly signs, and inti-

mating we only sought protection from the storm, they became reassured, and offered us some nuts, of a pleasant flavor, peculiar to the country, and which, as I learned, formed their principal food. We spent the night with them, and were treated with hospitality.

On leaving I presented the host with a pocket-knife, which he received with an ejaculation of delight and examined curiously. On opening it, and showing him its uses, his joy increased to such a degree, that, by signs, he immediately volunteered to act as guide, and was accepted by us without hesitation.

He proved of great service, in showing us the shortest and best route over the mountains, and as a kind of body-guard against other savages, whom we now occasionally met, but whom he restrained from approaching us with any undue familiarity.

On arriving in sight of Sutter's settlement—situated near the junction of the Rio Sacramento and Rio de los Americanos, or River of the Americans—we gave a wild shout of joy, and our guide made signs that he would go no further.

As he had been with us several days, and had proved so faithful, we could not bear to have him part from us without a further testimonial of our generosity and gratitude. Accordingly drawing from my belt a silver-mounted pistol, I discharged it, showed him how to load and fire it, and then presented it to him, together with a belt-knife and a good supply of powder and ball, and he went back with all the pride of an emperor marching from the conquest of another kingdom.

Hurrying forward, with feelings which are indescribable, we passed through a beautiful valley, green with blade and bright with flowers—through an Indian village, where every person appeared neat and comfortable, and well disposed toward us—and at last, ascending a slight eminence, just as day was closing, beheld before us, not half a mile distant, an American fortress, though in a Mexican country and garrisoned by Indians.

In fifteen minutes more we had passed the dusky sentinel at the gate, and entered an asylum of rest from our long pilgrimage.

We were received by Captain Sutter himself, who, gathering only a brief outline of our adventures and sufferings, expressed surprise to see us here alive, shook our hands with all the warm-heartedness of a *friend*, and gave us a most cordial invitation to make his citadel our home as long as we might feel disposed to remain in the country.

CHAPTER XXV.

A TERRIBLE MISFORTUNE.



WORN-OUT and starved-out, our garments all in tatters, our frames emaciated, our faces long, thin and sallow, with sunken eyes and a beard of some two months' growth, we pre-anything but an attractive appearance on our first arrival at Sutter's. But with the aid of soap and water, a keen razor, new raiment, and a couple of weeks' rest, we began once more to resemble civilized beings, and feel like ourselves.

Captain Sutter we found to possess all the refined qualities of a hospitable gentleman. He had emigrated to this region a year or two previous to our arrival, and had already succeeded in establishing a fort on a large grant of land obtained from the Mexican government.

He had succeeded, too, in subduing and making good citizens the surrounding Indians, many of whom were already in his employ—some as soldiers, to guard his fortress—some as husbandmen, to till his soil—and some as *vaqueros*, or cow-herds, to tend upon his cattle; so that everything around gave indications of an industrious, wealthy and prosperous settler.

Here we remained through the winter, amusing ourselves in various ways; sometimes in hunting among the mountains, exploring the country, and fishing in the streams; at others, in making ourselves masters of the

Spanish tongue, which was spoken by many of the Indians and all of the natives. This last, however, was more for our benefit than amusement, as we had determined on a visit to the seaport places in the lower latitudes of Mexico as soon as the ground should be in a fit condition for traveling after the annual spring rains.

It was some time between the first and middle of May, that, mounted upon a couple of fiery horses—which, decked off with all the showy trappings of two complete Spanish saddle equipments, had been pressed upon us as a present by our generous host—we bade adieu to the noble-hearted Captain Sutter and family and set out upon our southern journey.

As we rode along, it was with feelings of pleasant sadness we looked back over the eventful past, and remembered that about this time a year ago, two gay youths, fresh from college, were leaving friends and home for the first time, to venture they scarce knew whither.

And what of those friends now? Were they alive, and well, and in prosperity? Had their thoughts been much on the wanderers? Had they looked for our return? Had they wept in secret for our absence, and prayed daily for our preservation? Ah! yes, we well knew all this had been done; and the thought that we were still keeping them in suspense—that we were still venturing further and further away—could not but make us sad. But, withal, as I said before, it was a pleasant sadness; for we secretly felt a delight in going over new scenes—beholding new objects. Moreover, we were now in good health, our constitutions felt vigorous, and this tended to raise our spirits.

What an eventful year the past one had been! Through what scenes of trial, privation, suffering and peril had we not passed! And yet, amid all, how had we been sustained by the hand of Omnipotence! How had we been lifted up and borne forward over the quicksands of despair! And when all appeared an endless, rayless night, how had our trembling souls been rejoiced by the sudden light of hope beaming upon our pathway and showing us a haven of rest!

But where would another year find us? In what

quarter of the habitable globe? and under what circumstances? Should we be among the living? or the dead? The dead! What a solemn thought, that our bones might be reposing in the soil of the stranger, thousands of miles from all we loved and from all that loved us! What a startling idea! And yet, in our journeyings, how indifferent, how careless, had we been of life! With what fool-hardiness had we even dared death to meet us! And still, with all the frightful warnings of the past before us, how recklessly were we plunging on to new scenes of danger! Why did we not turn now, and bend our steps homeward? Had we not seen enough, suffered enough, to satisfy the craving desires of youth?

Home! what a blessed word of a thousand joys! With what pleasing emotions the thought would steal upon our senses! What a world of affection was centered there! What happy faces the thought recalled! and how we longed to behold them! Longed, yet took the very course to put time and distance between us and them! And this to gratify what our sober reason told us was only a foolish, boyish passion—a craving love of adventure!

Home! In that word I beheld the loved faces of my parents. In that word I beheld the welcome visages of my friends. In that word, more than all, I beheld the sweet, melancholy countenance of Lilian!

Lilian! how this name stirred the secret emotions of a passionate soul! Had I forgotten her? Had I, through all the varied scenes I had passed, for a moment lost sight of her lovely countenance? of her sweet eyes beaming upon me the warm affection of an ardent soul? No! I had not forgot, I never could forget, her. She was woven among the fibres of my existence. To tear her hence would be to rend the soul itself. Thousands of miles away, she was not absent. She was with me in all my trials, sufferings and perils. Present by day, with her eyes of love. Hovering around me in the still watches of night, as it were the guardian angel of my destiny. Ah! Lilian was loved. Time and distance proved it. Loved with a heart that could never forsake her—never so love another. I had done her a wrong.

But should God spare my life, and permit us again to meet, how quickly, by every means in my power, would I strive to repair it !

Such and similar were my thoughts as we again bent our steps upon a long journey.

I am not going to describe our journey to the south. Like similar journeys, it was full of fatigue, with here and there an incident, or a curiosity, perhaps a danger.

Suffice it, therefore, that with me you let a year pass unnoted. That you imagine us having gone a thousand miles into the heart of Mexico, and, heartily sick and disgusted with our travels, the people, and for the most part the country, you now find us on our glad journey to the north !

You will fancy, then, that a year has passed ; and that we, having so far escaped with our lives, are now on our return to Upper California ; thence to shape our route to Oregon ; and then, ho ! for the far distant land of our childhood.

Little did we dream in that happy moment of contemplation of the terrible calamity about to befall us ! Little did we think that our hearts, bright with hope and joy, were soon to be clouded with woe unutterable ! grief inconsolable ! And why should we ? We who had been through so many perils, and made so many miraculous escapes, where death seemed inevitable—why should we now, comparatively safe, already on our return, for a moment harbor the thought that a misfortune, before which all we had suffered would sink into insignificance, was impending ? How little does man know his destiny ! Poor, blind mortal ! what presumption in him to attempt the reading of the scroll of fate !

It was a bright, warm day, in the April of 1842, that we arrived at Pueblo de los Angeles, where the Great Spanish Trail comes in from Santa Fé. We had been on the move, day after day, for nearly a month, during which time we had traveled some five hundred miles, and our horses were very much fatigued in consequence. Besides, their shoes being worn out and their feet sore, we resolved to remain here a few days, to have them shod, recruited, and put in a good traveling condition, while

our time was to be spent in hunting and examining the country round about.

Giving our beasts in charge of a responsible person, with orders to see them well attended to, we set forward with our rifles; and taking the Spanish Trail, which here ran due east and west, we followed it some two miles; when, leaving it to the right, we struck off into the mountains known as the Coast Range.

About noon we came to a point where the country assumed a very rough and wild appearance. Cliff upon cliff rose one over the other: above which a few peaks still shot up far heavenward, capped with everlasting snows. Tremendous precipices, deep caverns, and wild gorges, could be seen on every hand, full of danger to the unwary explorer.

Making a halt, we were already debating whether to advance or retrace our steps, when, as if to decide and lure us forward, a fine antelope was discovered on a rock above us, not over a hundred yards distant, coolly eyeing us from his supposed safe retreat. Scarce a moment elapsed, so quick were the motions of each, ere our pieces, speaking together, told him too late of his error. He was wounded, this we could see, but not enough to prevent his flight, and he turned and bounded over the rocks up the steep.

"Ah, Frank," cried Huntly, with enthusiasm, "here is sport in earnest! Nothing to do but give chase. He must not escape us. Dart you up the mountain; while I, by going round, will perhaps head him off on the other side. At all events we will soon meet again!"

On the impulse of the moment I sprung forward in one direction and Huntly in another.

To the great danger of my neck, I clambered up the steep acclivity, over precipitous rocks, gaping fissures, and through a dense brushwood, and stood at last upon the spot where we had first seen the beast.

Here was a small pool of blood, and a bloody trail marked the course of the animal; and I pressed on again, rightly judging, from the quantity of blood left behind, that he could not hold out any great distance.

But the distance proved further than I had antici-

pated ; and half an hour found me completely out of breath, on the brow of one of the lower ridges, without having come in sight of the antelope.

Here the trail, more bloody than ever, took a downward course, and I counted on finding the chase between me and the foot of the hill.

At this moment I heard, as I fancied, the shout of my friend ; and thinking it one of delight, on being the first to reach the beast, I gave an answering one of joy, and descended rapidly on the red trail.

Within fifty yards of the valley I discovered the object of my quest, lying on his side, pierced by two bullets, and in the last agonies of death.

Applying my knife to his throat, I made an end of his sufferings, and then looked eagerly around for my friend.

He was nowhere to be seen.

I called—but no answer.

This somewhat surprised me, as I felt certain of having heard his voice in this direction.

Thinking he could not be far off, I repeated his name at the top of my lungs, but with no better success.

Although somewhat alarmed, I consoled myself by thinking I must have been mistaken in the sound I had heard, and that at all events he would soon make his appearance.

With this I seated myself on the ground, and, throwing the breech of my rifle down the mountain, occupied myself in reloading it.

Minute after minute went by, but no Huntly appeared, and I began to grow exceedingly uneasy.

For awhile I fancied he might be watching me from some near covert, just to note the effect of his absence ; but when a half hour had rolled around, and nothing had been seen or heard of him, I became alarmed in earnest.

Springing to my feet, I shouted his name several times, with all the accents of fright and despair.

Then darting down to the valley, I ran round the foot of the mountain, making the woods echo with my calls at every step.

In half an hour more I had gained the point where we

had parted ; but still no Huntly. God of mercy ! who can describe my feelings then !

Nearly frantic, I retraced my steps, shouting with all my might ; but, alas ! with no better success. There lay the antelope, as I had left it, showing that no one had been there during my absence.

Until the shades of night began to settle over the earth, I continued my almost frantic search ; and then, thinking it possible Huntly might have returned to the settlement, I set out for Los Angeles with the speed and feelings of a madman.

When I arrived there, it had long been night. To my eager inquiries, each and all shook their heads, and replied that my friend had not been seen since we departed in the morning.

Who could describe, who imagine, my anguish on hearing this ! Huntly, my bosom companion, was lost. Captured it might be by guerrillas, or by Indians. Destroyed, perhaps, by some wild beast, or by falling down some precipice, or into some chasm ! Gone he was, most certainly ; and I wrung my hands in terrible agony, and called wildly upon his name, though I knew he could not hear me.

So great was my distress, that it excited the pity of the spectators, several of whom volunteered to go back with me and search for him with torches.

The proposition I accepted eagerly ; and that night the mountains sparkled with flaming lights, and their deep recesses resounded with the name of my friend, and with cries of anguish. All night long we searched faithfully, and shouted with all our might. But, alas ! all was of no avail. My friend came not—answered not—perhaps never would again !

When daylight once more lighted that fatal spot, and those who had assisted me declared it useless to search longer, that Huntly was either dead or a prisoner, my anguish exceeded the strength of my reason to bear, and I became a raving maniac.

For two months from that date I had no knowledge of what was taking place around me ; and when, by the grace of God, conscious reason again returned, I found

myself in a feeble state, a miserable invalid at Pueblo de los Angelos.

To a noble-hearted Mexican lady, wife of a Mexican military officer, for her kindness to, and care of, a forlorn stranger, is due a debt of gratitude that I may never have power to cancel, but which it is my daily prayer may be found written upon the eternal pages of the Great Book of All-Good.

In June, a sad, emaciated, almost heart-broken being, I resumed my journey to the north. But alas! alas! poor Charles Huntly! His fate was still unknown. His last words to me, spoken gayly, "*At all events we shall soon meet again,*" had never been fulfilled.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WONDERFUL SURPRISES.



STOOD upon the summit of the Rocky Mountains. I stood upon that point of land which divides the rivers of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans; upon that mighty barrier which bids its gushing rivulets rolls eastward and westward; where, springing from the same source, as children from the same parents, they are separated by the hand of fate, to end their course thousands of miles apart.

I stood upon the great dividing ridge of the North American Continent, and cast my eyes over a mighty expanse of territory.

But with what feelings did I gaze around me! Were they feelings of joy? No! they could not be joyous. There was one absent from my side that made them sad. I needed the bright eye, noble face, commanding form, warm heart and strong hand of one who was now perhaps no more. Had *he* been by, my now melancholy

gaze would have been one of enthusiastic rapture. In every hill, in every tree, in every rock, in every rill, I would have beheld something to make my heart leap with delight—for now I was homeward bound.

What a strange creature is man ! It is said that he sees with his eyes—but I contend that his heart gives color to his vision. If not, why do the same scenes, unchanged in their appearance, to him present different aspects ? Why does that which to-day he beholds as something bright and beautiful, to-morrow wear the sable hue of gloom ? Is not the scene the same ? Are not his eyes the same ? Ay ! but yesterday his heart was light and bounding with joy—to-day it is dark and oppressed with grief. All the change, then, lies in the heart.

Yes ! here I stood—*alone*—my face set eastward—my steps bent to the still far distant land of my youth. What had I not been through, what had I not suffered, since quitting that roof under which I had known nothing but happiness and ease ? In little more than two years I felt I had lived an age, and even fancied my hair growing gray at twenty-two.

Yes ! I was wending my way to my native land ; but should God permit me to reach there alive, what an unenviable lot would be mine, to make the home of my friend the house of lamentation and woe !

And Lilian, dear Lilian—to whom, would to God, I could bring nothing but joy—I must be doomed to make her weep, to fill her bright eyes with tears, and robe her fair form in funereal weeds ! Alas ! alas ! what bitter necessity ! How my soul groaned in anguish at the thought, until I envied the supposed cold death-sleep of him I mourned.

Such were some of my thoughts and feelings as I commenced descending the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains.

I have said nothing of my route hither, since leaving Pueblo de los Angeles, and for the very reason there was little or nothing to say. My horse had borne me hither ; my hand had guided him ; my food had been such as came in my way ; my sleep had been mostly upon the hard earth in the open air ; my route had occasionally been

pointed out to me—occasionally had been taken at a venture; I had sometimes had companions, and sometimes had traveled by myself; and, lastly, I was here now, alone, and that was the most I knew.

Oppressed with a burden of grief almost insupportable, I had taken little note of external objects. With a sort of instinct, I had, day after day, pursued my journey, perfectly reckless of that life which to me seemed more an infliction than a comfort. I had been surrounded by dangers at all times; I had been less cautious than previously in guarding against them; and yet here I was—alive—in fair bodily health—preserved how, and for what purpose, God only knew.

It was near the close of August, and the day was clear and cold. The sun, some three hours advanced toward noon, streamed over the scene his bright light, but without much apparent warmth. The north wind, sweeping down from the icy peaks of the Wind River Mountains—looming up in rugged masses away to the left—seemed to chill my very blood; and spurring my noble horse onward, I dashed down the long slope before me at a fast gallop.

A little after nightfall I came to a romantic valley, shut in by hills, through which a bright stream rolled, and foamed, and murmured over its rocky bed.

Here I beheld the fires of two encampments. The one nearest the bank of the river was evidently a party of emigrants; for, by the dim light, I could just trace the white outline of several covered wagons, and a few dark, moving objects near them, which I took to be their animals. I could also see a few figures flitting to and fro—some round the fire-lights, and some more distant—engaged, to all appearance, in preparing the evening's repast and settling themselves down for the night. The other encampment, separated from the first by some thirty or forty rods, consisted of only one fire, around which were squatted a small group of mountaineers.

To this I directed my horse, and, on coming up, said:

“Gentlemen, will you permit a solitary traveler to mess with you for the night?”

"Wall, we won't do nothin' else," replied a voice, which I fancied was not unfamiliar to me.

Although this answer signified I was welcome to join them, yet not a man moved, nor appeared to notice me at all.

This, however, did not disconcert me in the least, as I knew so well the morose, semi-social habits of the mountaineer, that, to gain a grunt of assent to my request, was the utmost I could expect.

I therefore dismounted, and, approaching the fire, scrutinized the faces of the party closely, as, rolling out clouds of tobacco smoke, they remained fixed, like posts in a circle, their eyes apparently seeing nothing but the flames.

Judge of my astonishment, reader, on discovering in this party of five, two of my old companions—Black George and Teddy O'Lagherty.

My first impulse was to spring forward and make myself known at once. But, on second thought, I concluded to remain unrecognized, and see what would be the result.

Removing the saddle and trappings from my horse, I hopped and left him to crop the green grass of the valley. Then, drawing near the fire, I sat myself down in the ring, just far enough back to have a shade upon my face.

The trappers were engaged in conversation of more than ordinary interest, and appeared not to notice me; while, for my own part, I determined not to interrupt them.

"Think she'll hev to go under!" observed Black George, with an ominous shake of the head. "Thar's many places better to be sick in nor this here."

"Agh! jabers! but it's har-r-d now, so it is!" rejoined Teddy, looking very solemn. "Be me sowl, but I wish mesilf a docthor now—barring the physicking, that I don't like at all, at all—if ounly to make the face of that swaat crathur glad, by tilling her I knows her mother's ailment. Ochone! but she's the purtiest live one I've saan since laving ould Ireland, where I wish mesilf back agin. I could love her, jist, for looking so much

like me young masther, that's dead and gone, pace to his bones! Ochone! but this is a sorry world, so it is!"

"How she looked when she axed for a doctor of me!" observed another. "Ef I hadn't left soon, I'd a done so'thin' womanish, sartin."

"Augh!" grunted Black George, knocking the ashes from his pipe; "sich sights as them ain't fit for us mountaineers."

"Of whom are you speaking, friends?" I now inquired, deeply interested.

"A beauthifful lady, sir, and her mother as is sick!" replied Teddy, turning toward me an eager look.

I instantly shaded my face with my hand, as if to keep off the heat, and saw I was not recognized.

"And where is the lady you speak of?"

"In the wagin, yonder. The ould lady's sick, and they've not got a spalpeen of a docthor among 'em; and the young miss is a cryin' like she'd break her heart, poor thing! For the mather of that, there's two young famales, now, that's cryin'—but only one saams to be the daughther. Maybe it's a docthor you is, now, by your wee look and thinness?"

"I was educated to the profession, but have never practiced."

"Troth! it's no difference—ye must go an' sae the lady—for it's Heaven as has sint ye here, I'm knowing mesilf!"

"But, Ted—(I was on the point of speaking his name)—but I have no medicine."

"Divil a bit of difference for that! Ye must be afther saaing her, if ye's a docthor—and can spaak the Lathin names they give whin physic's short—if ounly to comfort the young lady that's dyin' of grief."

"Well, well, I will go," I said, finding myself fully in for it, and my curiosity being a good deal excited to see the lady whom all agreed in describing as beautiful.

"Ah! that's a good sowl ye is now!" said the warm, generous-hearted Teddy, who seemed as much interested for the fair stranger as if she were his own sister. "It's a good sowl ye is, now, to go and sae her! Faith! ye puts

me in mind of a young mather I once had, voice and all, barring that he was a wee bit bether looking 'an you is."

"Indeed! And what was your master's name?"

"Och! I had a pair of 'em! One was Misther Huntly, a lawyer—and the other, Misther Leighton, a docthor. It's the docthor ye puts me in mind of now."

"Well, what became of them?"

"Oh, sir!" cried Teddy, wiping the tears from his eyes; "they got killed, sir! The divilish, murthering, baastly thaves of Injins killed and ate 'em! Ochone! ochone!" and he wrung his hands at the bare thought and sobbed for very grief.

"Why, you seem to take it to heart as much as if they were related to you!"

"And so would you, an' ye'd a knowed 'em, sir. They was two sich swaat youths! Parfict gintlemen, an' jist from college, as I hearn 'em say meself. Ochone! but I'd a died for 'em asy, and no questions axed, an' they'd a towld me to!"

"Leighton! Leighton!" repeated I, musingly, as if trying to remember where I had before heard the name. "Leighton! fresh from college, say you? Was the one you term doctor from Boston?"

"Ah, troth was he!" cried Teddy, jumping up in excitement. "Then yees knowed him, sir, it's like, by your way of spaking, jist?"

"I know enough of him!" I answered, now fully determined on putting Teddy's friendship to the test.

"Arrah, sir! and what do yees maan by saying the likes of that now?"

"What do I mean? Why, my meaning is very simple. I know that this fellow, you are so fond of lauding, is not a whit better than I am."

"And I maan ye're a dirty spalpeen blaggard, docthor or no docthor, jist for spaking in that contimptible way of the finest gintleman as was iver saan! and no exciptions made to your dirty self, that's not worth the snap of me finger! Whoop! ye blaggard! don't be grinning that way at your bethers; but jist come out here, like a man, ye cowardly thafe, and sae what I'll taach yees! Whoop!"

Here the Irishman jumped up and cracked his heels, and made several warlike demonstrations with his fists, much to my amusement and satisfaction.

The trappers, too, gathered themselves upon their feet, in anticipation of a fight; and as I showed no disposition to reply to Teddy, Black George turned his dark visage to me, and said, gruffly:

"Come, young chap, you've got to chawr them words you've jest put a travelin', or else git licked afore you can say beans!"

"What have I said?" I replied, finding the matter becoming serious, and pretending to exculpate myself. "I merely intimated that Mr. Leighton was no better than myself; and what more could I say, when of course I think myself as good as anybody?"

"Yes, it's all very wall, boy, for you to talk," returned Black George; "but heyar's what knows a insult from a beaver, I reckons; and ef you don't chawr them words in less nor two minutes, and own up you ain't no equal to him you've spoke agin, I'll ram some fodder down your gullet you won't swoller easy—ef I don't, I hope I may be dogged for a dirty skunk all my life!" and he ended by shaking his fist rather nearer my face than was agreeable.

"Yis, and now be takin' thim back!" roared Teddy, making preparations to spring upon me; "or I'll turn yees inside out, and shake ye as I used me mather's carpet-bag, that's dead and gone—not the bag, but the mather, ye blaggard yees!"

I now found, that to restore myself to the good graces of my friends, I should be obliged to make myself known. As I had fully tested their friendship for my absent self, I lost no further time.

"Gentlemen," I rejoined mildly, "I can prove everything I have said; and even you will acknowledge it when I tell you who I am. You behold before you, not the calumniator of Francis Leighton, but Francis Leighton himself, your old friend."

Had a bomb suddenly fallen and burst at their feet it could not have caused more surprise and wonder with

Teddy and Black George than did this simple declaration.

At first they both took a step or two backward ; and then, springing forward, each caught me by an arm, and drawing me close to the fire, peered eagerly into my face. One full, penetrating glance sufficed.

"Him, by thunder !" cried Black George.

"Saints and angels !" shouted Teddy, throwing his arms around my neck, and weeping like a child. Then, taking another long look into my face, he sprung away, and shouting, "Be the piper's cross, it's him himsilf ! me young mather's alive !" he danced and capered around me with all the wild gestures of joyful insanity—sometimes weeping, and sometimes laughing, and occasionally catching hold of me, as if to assure himself of my identity, and that it was no false vision, no hallucination of the brain.

Black George, meantime, pressed my hand warmly, and said, in a voice slightly tremulous with emotion :

"Boy, I never reckoned on seein' you agin. Thought you'd gone under—I'll be dog-gone ef I didn't ! You fit wall—I'll be dogged ef you didn't ! But whar d'ye float to ? and whar's your pardner ?"

Some half an hour was now spent in questions and answers ; during which I learned that Fiery Ned and Rash Will had both been killed at Bitter Cottonwood ; that Daring Tom had been severely wounded, and shortly after left for the States ; that Carson had escaped, and was at the present time acting as guide to Colonel Fremont ; that Teddy had been on a trapping adventure with Black George and two or three others ; that, having recently made a trip to St. Louis, they were now on their way to the mountains ; and that neither myself nor Huntly had been heard from since that eventful night—in consequence of which they had supposed us killed or made prisoners.

In turn I gave them a brief outline of my own adventures, up to the loss of my friend, at which both expressed deep sympathy, and Teddy wept freely.

"Spaking of Mither Huntly," said Teddy, at length,

"puts me in mind that ye's not yit saan the sick woman, your honor."

"True, Teddy—I had forgot. Lead the way !"

At the word, we quitted the trappers, and set forward to the larger encampment, where I found some six or eight heavy, covered wagons, arranged in a circle.

In the center of the area stood a group of men, conversing in low tones, and glancing occasionally at one of the vehicles, around which several women were collected—the faces of all, as far as I could see, expressive of deep sympathy and sorrow.

Close to the wagon, in which on a rude bed the invalid was lying, were two young females, apparently of the better class ; one of whom, clasping the thin hand of the sick person, particularly arrested my attention by her display of violent grief. The other appeared to be weeping also ; but the faces of both were from me, so that I could only conjecture the latter.

Taking the lead, Teddy forced his way through the crowd, and, lightly touching the shoulder of the one who held the invalid's hand, said, in a gentle tone :

"Here's a docthor, marm."

The next moment I found myself the cynosure of many eyes ; while the one addressed, turning short round, gave one glance, and, uttering a strange, wild cry, sunk to the earth in a swoon.

What this meant I was at a loss to comprehend, for her features had been in the shade of the same light which had revealed mine to her.

"Nervous excitement !" I said to myself ; "joy at beholding a physician at hand ;" and, springing forward, I bent down to raise her.

Already had my arms encircled her slender form—already was I on the point of lifting her from the earth—when the light of a torch flashed full on her pale countenance.

One look ! one sudden start ! one exclamation of agonized wonder ! and then I remained fixed, with eyes half starting from their sockets—speechless—motionless—seemingly transformed to stone—my arms encircling—merciful God !—the lovely form of—*Lilian Huntly* !

CHAPTER XXVII.

MANY THINGS.



HERE are feelings that cannot be described. There are emotions too deep for utterance. There are times when the mind has power to paralyze the body: when racking thought forces us to live an age in a minute: when we see and know all that is going on around us, and yet seem to be separate from the world—to exist in a world of ideality—a spiritual state: when our whole life, like a map, seems spread before us; and we behold, at a single glance, in a second of time, what has taken us years to enact: when, leaping over the past and the present, we seem to pierce the great veil of the future and behold our destiny.

May not this be a foretaste of death? May we not so see, and feel, and know, when the spirit shall have become separated from its frail tenement of mortality?

I have said there are such feelings and emotions; but they can only result from the most powerful causes. Neither do they affect all in the same manner. While a few experience the sensations just described, to others the same or similar causes may be productive of death, insanity, or the death-like swoon of utter forgetfulness.

Of the former class was I—of the latter Lilian. The same emotions which destroyed her consciousness, paralyzed my physical powers, and forced me to a consciousness beyond the natural.

Bending over her—my eyes seemingly glazed, and fixed upon her sweet face, now pale and death-like—I remained spell-bound—all my animal faculties suspended.

I heard a trampling of feet, as several persons hurried to our assistance—I heard voices expressive of alarm and dismay—and, above all, the voice of the invalid calling Lilian by name. I was conscious of

being removed—of seeing the idol of my heart raised and borne away also. I felt my limbs chafed by half a dozen hands, and water dashed in my face. I saw thus, felt thus, comprehended all—and yet my mind was wandering far away to other scenes.

Have we power to think of more than one thing at the same time? I contend that we have—or else that thought, swift beyond comparison, sets before us different scenes with such rapidity that we *seem* to behold two at once—sometimes half a dozen—and yet each perhaps as opposite and distant as the north and south poles.

While I comprehended what was going on around me, my mind flew back to youth—to the time when I first felt a passion for Lillian—and traced every event of my life up to the present moment. Even the dream—in which I had seen her bowed down by poverty, and finally murdered by my supposed rival—was painfully remembered; and it now recurred to me as a vision of prophecy. Something fearful had happened, and I had been warned of it in my sleep.

How is it that in our sleep events are made known to us, that really are, or are about, taking place? Can it be that the spirit then roams at will, in all the freedom of disembodiment, and returns freighted with intelligence to communicate to the physical senses? Let the philosopher and metaphysician answer! Enough for me the effect, without at present seeking the cause.

And here, to keep my narrative straight before the reader, let me digress one moment, to place him in possession of facts which I gleaned afterward—partly from Lillian—partly from her companions of the journey.

It will be remembered, that, in the opening of this story, I mentioned my own father, and the father of my friend, as being wealthy merchants in the city of Boston.

Shortly after our departure—it might be on that very night of my singular dream—news of the failure of three large houses in New York, gave Mr. Huntly the astounding information that he was not worth a thousand dollars beyond his obligations.

I am not going to describe his feelings, nor those of the family, on finding themselves thus suddenly reduced

from a state of unlimited wealth to one of comparative poverty.

The effect upon the elder Huntly was to ruin him in his own estimation for life, and it soon became apparent to his friends that he would not long survive the shock. All his energy, his ambition, went with his property, and a cloud of melancholy and grief settled over his once bright and joyous countenance. Several warm-hearted friends, among whom was my father, came forward and offered to assist him—but all to no avail. He refused assistance—declaring it to be the chastening hand of God, to prepare him to depart to his long home. Depression of spirits brought on physical debility, and the winds of the succeeding autumn sung a dirge over his grave.

A father and husband dead—a brother and son away, perhaps dead also—made the home of Lilian and her mother a house of mourning indeed; and what they suffered for the next two years, I must leave to the imaginations of those who have felt a similar visitation of the hand of Providence.

After paying the debts of the estate, a remnant of property remained; to which a few friends, on pretense they owed the deceased, for this favor or that, generously added more; so that, although comparatively poor, they were in a measure above want. They left their fine mansion, to reside in a small but pleasant house, owned by my father, but for which he would receive no rent.

Here they remained for eighteen months, laboring under a weight of affliction which those only can know who have lost friends by death, been suddenly reduced from affluence to poverty, and seen the cold, stinging look of scorn and contempt upon the lips of those heartless beings who were wont to play the fawning sycophant and utter words of flattery and deceit as worthless as themselves.

During the winter of 1841 and '42, much was said concerning Oregon; and, as generally happens with every new place to which public attention becomes particularly directed, there were not lacking exaggerated accounts, which set it forth as the real El Dorado of the world. Whether these owed their origin to the prolific

brains of certain romantic editors, or to the more designing ones of speculators, or to both combined (the most probable), matters not ; but the effect was to set on foot a tide of emigration, which, had it long continued without check, would have made Oregon a populous country.

Among those who had caught this "Western fever," as it was frequently termed, were a few wealthy farmers in the vicinity of Boston, with one family of whom Mrs. Huntly had an intimate acquaintance.

Being on a visit to them in the winter, she soon learned, much to her surprise, that they were already making preparations to start, on the opening of spring, for this great El Dorado—this *Ultima Thule* of western emigration. Several of their acquaintances were going to join them ; and, above all, an eccentric lady of wealth and refinement, who, with her beautiful daughter, had for the past year been the lioness and belle of the aristocratic and fashionable circles of Boston.

Of this lady, who was known as Madame Mortimer—as also her daughter, who had received the sobriquet of Belle Eva, the latter being her Christian name—Mrs. Huntly had more than once heard ; and it was with no little surprise she then learned of their determination to venture upon such a long, tedious and dangerous journey ; and she mentally said, "When such people resolve to leave all the allurements of civilization, there must be something worth going for ;" and this probably proved one of the strongest arguments to induce her to make one of the party herself. In addition to this her country friends were enthusiastic on the subject of Oregon, of which they had received the most glowing, and of course exaggerated, accounts, and were eager in urging her to join them. Oregon City, a name which sounded well to the ear, was to be their destination. Of this they already had maps, on which the broad streets and squares looked very attractive. Here each and all were to make their fortunes ; and, in the visionary excitement of the moment, they overlooked the sober fact that Oregon City then existed on the map only, drawn up by some specu-

lator, and that its handsome streets and squares were simply imaginary locations in an utter wilderness.

But why prolong? why enter into a detail of the hundred little causes which combined to decide Mrs. Huntly (a lady whose main faults were an enthusiastic love of new projects, an overweening confidence in her own judgment, and a willful adherence to her own decisions, right or wrong), in joining this ill-timed expedition? contrary to the advice of her friends and of Lilian—the latter of whom consented to accompany her that she might not be separated from her only parent.

Enough that she had so decided; and that early in the spring succeeding, having disposed of all her effects, she and Lilian, in company with Madame and Eva Mortimer (whom the fashionable world of course considered insane), and some eight or ten families, had set out on their long journey to the far, Far West.

And here, apropos of Madame Mortimer and her lovely daughter, of whom much remains to be said at no distant period. Although they had appeared in the fashionable circles of Boston and were reputed wealthy, nothing of their private history was generally known; and of course, as regarded them, curiosity was excited to a great degree, but without avail. They had been met among the *bon ton* of New York and invited to Boston. They had accepted the invitation, had passed the ordeal of fashionable criticism, had conducted themselves on all occasions with strict propriety, and had departed, right in the face of all the gossips, without a single one being the wiser for his or her inquiries.

As to who and what they were, and how connected with the foregoing and succeeding events of this life-history, the reader who continues to the end of the narrative will be enlightened.

It is needless for me to touch upon the journey of my friends westward. Like all emigrants who were then seeking Oregon for a home, they had experienced severe trials and vicissitudes, which upon them had fallen the more heavily from being the first hardships they had ever known.

Some three or four days previous to my joining

them, Mrs. Huntly had been taken sick ; and although Lilian had been greatly alarmed from the first, yet with the others the matter had not been thought serious, until the evening in question, when her symptoms had taken an unfavorable turn. Having no doctor among them, application for one had been made by Lilian to some of the trappers, who chanced to be passing ; and this, providentially, had brought us once more together after the long and eventful separation of more than two years.

Having thus, kind reader, put you in possession of facts important for you to know, I will return from my digression and go on with my narrative.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ANOTHER STRANGE DISCOVERY.



T was several minutes before I recovered from my paralysis ; and this was doubtless much accelerated by Teddy, who, having tried various ways to restore me, at last threw his arms around my neck, and, placing his mouth close to my ear, shouted :

“I say, your honor, is it dead ye is, now ? or is it dead ye’s jist agoing to be ? by the way ye’s stare so, and sez nothing at all, at all ?”

With a start, as if suddenly awakened from a dream, I looked around me, perceived myself the center of all eyes, and heard my name several times pronounced, coupled with that of Lilian, as here and there one, who had gained the secret of our strange behavior, sought to explain it to others. To most of the parties my name was already familiar, as the companion of young Huntly, and son of the wealthy Leighton of Boston, and this probably had no tendency to lessen curiosity.

My first feeling on regaining myself (if I may so ex-

press it) was one of confusion, that I had so publicly laid myself open to gossip ; my second, indignation at being so stared at ; my third, alarm as to what might be the effect of all this upon Mrs. Huntly ; and to her I immediately turned, without a word to the others.

Perhaps the reader, if a lover, is surprised that my first alarm was not for Lilian. Ay ! but I saw at a glance that Lilian was in good hands, and in a fair way of recovery, and it would have been injudicious at that moment to have drawn any more attention to her.

Mrs. Huntly I found lying upon a feather bed, in a large, covered wagon, underneath which was attached a furnace for warming it ; so that, all things considered, the patient was more comfortably situated than I had expected to find her.

In appearance she had altered much since I had last seen her. Her naturally rather florid complexion, and full, round face, had given place to pallor and thinness ; and here and there I could trace deep lines of care ; but I failed to note a single symptom portending immediate danger. Grief, fatigue of travel, and many anxieties of mind, together with a touch of influenza, had brought on a splenetic affection, something like what is termed hypochondria. She had fancied herself very ill, and in fact nigh unto death ; and I saw at once that if she could be persuaded that the crisis had passed, and that the danger was over, she would speedily recover ; and upon this I acted with decision.

The cause of her grief and of her being here, I did not then know—for the information I have given the reader on the subject was not obtained till afterward—and I saw it would not do to question her. It was necessary I should appear cheerful, whether I felt so or not, and accordingly I approached her with a smile. Instantly her eye brightened as it met mine ; and I perceived, to my great satisfaction, that the alarm occasioned by the swoon of Lilian had proved beneficial, in drawing her thoughts from herself to another and arousing all her dormant faculties.

Extending her hand as I approached, she said, with a sigh :

"Ah, Francis, I never thought we should meet thus."

"True," I replied, "I had thought to meet you under other circumstances—though I presume all has happened for the best."

"You find me very low, do you not?"

"You *have* been ill," I answered, emphasizing the word have; "but everything I see has turned in your favor."

"How?" she exclaimed, quickly, raising her head, and fixing her eyes intently upon mine; "would you imply that I am not in a dangerous condition?"

"I would not imply it," I rejoined, with energy, pretending to judge by her pulse, "but I will assert it as an indisputable fact. If in a week from this you are not as well as you ever were in your life, I will give you leave to call me an impostor."

"Really, Francis, you surprise me!" she said, with animation. "In fact I believe I do feel better. But I *have* been sick—you admit that?"

"Oh, most certainly," I said, rejoiced to perceive the beneficial effects of my mental prescription. "You *have* been very sick, and within an hour have been nigh unto death; but, thank Heaven, the crisis has passed, and you have nothing to do now but recover as fast as possible."

"But what is, or has been, my ailment?"

Here I remembered the suggestion of Teddy, and quickly mumbled over a long string of Latin names, with scientific explanations, much to the satisfaction of everybody but myself.

The spectators, who had crowded around to hear what I had to say—being, with but two or three exceptions, good, honest farmers and farmers' wives—nodded approval to each other, and gave me many a respectful glance, equivalent to telling me that my first case, without a single dose, had with them established my reputation as a skillful physician. Oh, the magic of big-sounding words! I would advise doctors and lawyers to use them on all occasions.

News of my decision, regarding the patient, flew rapidly from one to another—lighting each countenance, before gloomy, with a smile of pleasure—until it reached

the ear of Lilian ; who, just recovering from the effects of her swoon, uttered a cry of joy ; and, much to the surprise and satisfaction of those engaged in restoring her, suddenly sprung away from them and rushed to her mother.

"Oh, mother," she cried, "I have heard such good tidings !"

"All true, every word," returned her mother, gayly. "My physician has pronounced me out of danger ;" and she playfully pointed to me.

"God be praised !" cried Lilian, fervently. "What a miracle is this ! and how it relieves my anguished heart !"

Then turning upon me her sweet, pale, lovely countenance—her full, soft, blue eyes, moist with tears—she partly extended her hand, and gasped my name.

The next instant, regardless of time, place and the presence of others, she was clasped in my arms, strained to my heaving breast, and my lips were pressed to hers in the holy kiss of mutual love.

It was a blissful moment, notwithstanding all we had both suffered. But it was a moment only ; for the next instant she sprung away, blushing and abashed at what she doubtless considered her own boldness.

"You're a wonderful docthor, your honor," whispered Teddy in my ear. "Faith ! ye jist looks at 'em, and jabbers a few Lathin names, and they're betther'n they iver was—afore they've time to know what ailed 'em, jist—and, troth ! a hugging yees at that, too, the purtiest one among 'em. Is it knowin' thim ye is ? or does the likes of her kiss by raason of yees being a docthor ? Jabbers ! it's what I'd like done to mesilf, now, in any perfishion !"

"Hush, Teddy ! These are the sister and mother of my lost friend, Charles Huntly."

"Oh, howly Moses ! did I iver, now !" exclaimed Teddy, staggering back with surprise.

"Hush !" I whispered in his ear, catching him by the arm with a grip sufficient to impress the importance of my words. "Not a syllable concerning Huntly, as you value your life !"

"Agh !" returned Teddy, placing his finger to his

lips, winking his eye, and nodding his head: "I'm whist as a dead buzzard, I is."

This caution was not made any too soon, for the next moment Mrs. Huntly exclaimed:

"But, Francis, where is my son? Where is Charles, that he does not make his appearance?"

"Oh, yes, my brother?" cried Lilian.

I was suddenly seized with a serious fit of coughing, so as to gain time for a reply. It would not do to let them know the true state of the case, and I could not think of telling them a falsehood. A happy thought struck me, and I answered:

"Charles is not with me."

"Indeed! Where is he, then?" cried both in a breath.

"We parted in California; I left him going eastward; and, for what I know, he may be now in Boston."

"God help him, then, when he hears the awful news, and finds himself homeless and friendless, poor boy!" cried Mrs. Huntly, with a burst of grief, in which Lilian joined.

I now inquired what had happened; and learned, in the course of conversation, much of that which I have already given the reader.

"Poor Charles!" I sighed to myself; "it is well if he is dead! Better be dead than return to a once happy home, only to find his friends gone and himself a beggar!"

With Lilian and her mother, in their misfortunes, I sympathized deeply; but fearing these saddening thoughts might prove injurious to Mrs. Huntly, I hastened to console her, by saying:

"We should bear in mind that all are born to die; that riches are unstable; and that whatever happens, is always for the best, though we may not be able to think so at the time."

"That I believe to be the true philosophy of life!" said a middle-aged lady at my side, whom, with her daughter, a meet companion for Lilian, I had more than once noticed, as possessing superior accomplishments—

though, under the press of excitement, I had failed to closely scan the features of either.

I now turned at once to the speaker, and was immediately introduced by Lilian to Madame Mortimer and her daughter Eva.

"Strange!" I said to myself, as, bowing to each, I became struck with the familiarity of their features. "I have seen these faces before, methinks—but where I cannot tell."

The name, however, perplexed me—for I had no remembrance of ever having before been introduced to a Mortimer.

"Your countenance seems familiar," I said, addressing the elder lady.

"And so does yours, sir!" she replied; "and for the last half hour I have been trying to recall where I have seen you—but in vain."

Suddenly the whole truth flashed upon me.

"Were you not in New York with your daughter some two years since?" I inquired, eagerly.

"I was."

"At the National Theatre, on the night it was burned?"

"I was."

"Did not some one rescue your daughter from the flames?"

"Gracious Heaven! yes; I remember now—I remember!" she exclaimed, a good deal agitated. "It was you, sir—you! I thought I knew those features!" and, excited by powerful emotions, she seized both of my hands in hers, and, pressing them warmly, uttered a "God bless you!" while her eyes filled with tears of gratitude.

Eva was too much affected to trust her voice in the utterance of a single word—but her look spoke volumes.

What a strange combination of startling events had this night revealed to me! How mysteriously had Providence arranged and put them together for some great design! Who could have imagined that the mere act of saving a fellow creature's life—a stranger at that,

in a strange city—and leaving her without knowing her name, or even her residence, for a long journey of many thousand miles—was to have a direct bearing upon my future destiny and that of my friend? Yet such was the fact; and however unimportant the incident might have appeared at the time to the reader—however irrelative to the main story—yet on that very circumstance, unknown to any, was depending many of the important events which followed those already described, and which in due time will be given.

It was with sensations peculiar to each, that these matters were narrated and commented upon for the next two hours; and doubtless not one who heard the strange and romantic story of how I had saved the life of Eva Mortimer, but felt his most trivial act to result from the hidden design of a Higher Power.

As for myself, such a chaos of ideas crowded my brain as made it impossible for me to describe what I thought, or what feeling had the preponderance, unless it were a mingling of pleasure and sadness.

Only one thing now seemed wanting to make me joyful; and that, alas! was my friend. Had he been present, notwithstanding all adverse circumstances, my heart would have bounded with rapture.

And he! what would have been his feelings, thus to have met, in *propria personæ*, the idol of his dreams? thus to have been placed in direct communion with Eva Mortimer—the beautiful Unknown?

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE END OF A LONG JOURNEY.



T was late in the night, and all had become still in the encampment. The animals—consisting of mules, horses, oxen and cows—had been driven together and tethered, and were taking their repose.

In the area, formed by the wagons, two fires were burning, at one of which sat Teddy and myself, half dozing, with our rifles resting against our shoulders. We had volunteered our services as sentinels for the night, but our watch could hardly be termed vigilant.

In the surrounding vehicles the emigrants were already giving evidence of that sound sleep which indicates health and weariness and a cessation of the physical and mental faculties.

I was, as I said before, in a half-dozing state. I had been conning over the many singular pranks of fortune connected with myself, and particularly the wonderful revelations of the last six or eight hours. I had been musing upon the complicated web of man's existence, and already had my thoughts begun to wander as in a dream.

A rumbling sound, like the roaring of a distant waterfall, caught my ear. Gradually it grew louder and nearer, until I fancied I could detect the pattering of a horse's feet upon the hard earth.

Nearer and nearer it came, and I found my impression confirmed. It was a horse at full speed; but what could it mean?

Suddenly Teddy sprung up and tightly grasped his rifle.

We now both darted outside the circle of wagons. By the dim light we beheld a horse and rider rapidly dashing up the valley.

The next moment the beast was reined in to a dead halt, some twenty yards distant.

"Who goes there?" I cried,

"A friend," was the answer, in a clear, silvery voice. "Be on your guard, or you will be surprised by Indians!"

Heavens! I should know those tones! Could it be possible?

"Prairie Flower?" I called.

"Ha! who are you?" was the answer; and the next moment the coal-black pony, and his beautiful, mysterious rider, stood by my side.

"Prairie Flower! and do we indeed meet again?"

"Who are you?" said she, bending down to scrutinize my features. "Ah! is it indeed possible!" she continued, with no little agitation, as she recognized me. "How you have altered! I—I—but I have no time to talk! I must not be seen here. It would cost me my life. I may see you again. Be on your guard! How strange! I never thought to see you again. I must go!"

These sentences were uttered rapidly, almost incoherently, while the voice of the speaker trembled, and there seemed a wildness in her manner.

On concluding, she tightened her rein, as if to depart—but still lingered, as if to add something more.

"Heaven bless you, Prairie Flower! you are always seeking the good of others."

She sighed, turned her head away, and strove to say carelessly:

"Your friend—I—I—is well—is he?"

"Alas! I cannot answer."

"Ha! what! how!" she cried, quickly, turning full upon me, and grasping my arm, which chanced to be resting on the neck of her pony. "Explain!" and I felt her grasp tighten.

I hurriedly related our last parting.

For some moments she did not reply, while her whole frame trembled violently. At length she withdrew her hand, tightened the rein again, and gasped the single word:

"Farewell!"

Ere I had time for another syllable, her pony was speeding away like the wind ; and ere I had recovered from my surprise, both were lost in the darkness.

So sudden had all this happened, that I felt completely bewildered. Was I dreaming?

A word from Teddy aroused me.

Dispatching him to the trappers, to ask their assistance, I flew back to the larger encampment and gave the alarm.

Instantly the whole camp was in commotion ; and, amid the cries of women and children, the men grasped their arms and sprung from their coverts, excited and pale, but ready to meet danger without flinching in defense of those whose lives they prized above their own.

I hurried round the camp to quiet the fears of the weaker members, by telling them there was little or no danger—that the Indians, if they came at all, finding us ready to receive them, would not risk an attack.

In this, much to my surprise, I was shortly aided by Lilian and Eva, both of whom displayed a heroic coolness, and presence of mind, and fearlessness of danger, for which, among all the virtues I had allowed them, I had given them no credit whatever. Had I been required, before this event, to select the most timid of the party, I should have pointed them out first. Modest, unassuming, retiring in their manners, weak in physical powers, unused to hardships and dangers, with a superior refinement in thought and feeling, I had supposed they would be the first to shrink at any alarm. Judge of my astonishment, then, when I saw them gliding over the earth, as over a soft carpet, and, with scarcely an appearance of fear, by their acts and language shaming the more frightened to silence.

The arrival of the trappers, too, well armed, and their seeming indifference to danger, reassured all in a measure, and served to restore order and quiet.

Hastily organizing, we marched outside the wagons, and took up our position so as to watch and guard any point of compass, not knowing at which the foe might make his appearance and onset.

All relapsed into silence, in which manner an hour

was passed, and we were beginning to think the alarm false, when one of the men espied a dark object, as he fancied, slowly nearing him.

Without a second thought, crack went his rifle ; and instantly, as if by magic, a dark spot to the north of us became peopled by some fifty savages ; who, finding themselves discovered, and doubtless thinking this the alarm of the sentinel, uttered frightful yells and sprung forward in a body.

Rushing to the point of attack, we hastily formed a line, and, placing our rifles to our shoulders, silently waited until not more than twenty yards divided us from the main body of our enemies.

“Fire !” cried a voice ; and instantly a dozen rifles poured their deadly contents among the dusky horde, with good effect, as could be told by several frightful groans of pain.

This was a reception the savages had not counted on, and they in turn became alarmed.

Suddenly pausing, they uttered yells of dismay, and, discharging their pieces at random, the balls of which whistled past us without a single injury, they turned and fled precipitately.

The victory was ours, and to Prairie Flower we owed our lives.

The remainder of the night we kept to our arms, but were not again disturbed, and by sunrise the whole party was on the move up the mountains.

As I could not think of parting with my friends (above all with Lilian) in the wilderness, I resolved to accompany them to their destination ; and then to—to—I scarcely knew what.

Teddy of course went with me ; and the trappers, in a spirit of friendship, kept us company many days.

I shall not weary you, reader, with a detail of all the little incidents of our tedious progress to Oregon City.

Suffice, that it was such as all emigrants experience in a greater or less degree, and was attended with a succession of scenes similar to those described throughout these pages.

As I had predicted, the health of Mrs. Huntly was

gradually restored ; and within ten days from the commencement of her convalescence, she declared herself as well as at any period of her life ; and that the word of her young doctor, as she jokingly termed me, was equal in effect to the combined virtues of the whole *materia medica*.

The return of Mrs. Huntly's strength and spirits, brought pleasure to the eye and bloom to the cheek of Lilian, which my daily presence, as I was vain enough to flatter myself, did not tend to lessen.

Be that as it may (and I leave the reader to judge), this long journey, so full of hardship and peril, however unpleasant it might have proved to her, and to others, I must ever look back to with pleasure, as one of the happiest periods of my so far eventful life.

Crossing the Rocky Mountains at the well-known South Pass, we continued on the regular Oregon route ; passed Fort Hall ; went down the Snake River and over the Salmon Mountains to Fort Boise ; through the country of Shoshones, or Snake Indians, over the Blue Mountains to Fort Walla Walla, on the Columbia ; down the Columbia, over the Cascade range, to Oregon City, on the pleasant little Willamette ; where we all safely arrived about the middle of December.

At this period, as I have before remarked, Oregon City existed only in name—being, with the exception of a few log houses, (erected during the summer and fall previous, by a few emigrants, who had reached here in advance of our party,) a complete wilderness.

The appearance of the place, so different from what they had expected to find it, disheartened my worthy friends not a little ; and had such a thing then been possible, I believe they would at once have returned to their native land.

But this was out of the question ; there was no help for their oversight now, only by making the best of a bad bargain ; and so, after having grumbled to their hearts' content—wished Oregon for the thousandth time at the bottom of the sea, and themselves back home as many—they set to work in earnest to provide themselves

homes for the winter, declaring that spring should see them on their way to the States.

With proper energy, properly directed, a great deal may be accomplished in a very short time ; and in less than two weeks from their earnest commencement, no less than eight or ten cabins were added to the few already there.

Into these the different families removed themselves and their goods, Teddy and I taking up our abode in that appropriated to Mrs. Huntly.

Although without any effects save such as had been brought with them, and short of provisions also, yet, by one means and another, all managed to get through the winter as comfortably as could be expected ; and instead of preparing to return, spring found the majority of the new settlers entering lands, determined on making this their future residence, be the consequences what they might.

Some three or four, among whom was Madame Mortimer and her daughter, were still disaffected, and would gladly have retraced their steps ; but they could not find companions enough to make the journey safe, and therefore against their will were forced to remain.

Oregon City I found beautifully located on the eastern bank of the Willamette ; and, from what I could judge, destined, at no very distant period, to become a great mart of the Far West.

Here I remained through the winter ; and as it proved open and mild, I employed my time in hunting and fishing, and conversing with the only being I truly loved.

Had my friend been with me, I should have looked upon the place as a perfect paradise ; but thoughts of him, of what might be his fate, would steal over me in my most joyous moments and cloud my brow with gloom.

These singular changes were noted by Lilian and others with feelings of surprise ; and frequently was I questioned by the former regarding them ; but I ever avoided a direct answer.

Neither Lilian nor her mother knew the true cause of Charles Huntly's absence ; and though I often meditated

telling them, yet, when it came to the point, I ever shrunk from the painful task of making both wretched. He *might* be living ; and the bare possibility of such a thing, I thought sufficient to justify me in keeping them in blissful ignorance of what I supposed to be his real fate. Both fondly anticipated seeing him the coming summer ; not doubting he had gone to the East ; and that, so soon as he should receive tidings of their location, he would set out to join them.

I had no such hopes—but I dared not tell them so.

It was a lovely day in the spring of 1843. On the banks of the romantic Willamette, under the shade of a large tree, I was seated. By my side—with her sweet face averted and crimson with blushes, her right hand clasped in mine, her left unconsciously toying with a beautiful flower, which failed to rival her own fair self—sat Lilian Huntly. It was one of those peculiar moments which are distinctly remembered through life. I had just offered her my hand and fortune, and was waiting, with all the trembling impatience of a lover, to hear the result.

“Say, Lilian, sweet Lilian, will you be mine?”

Her lily hand trembled, I felt its velvet-like pressure, but her tongue had lost the power of utterance. It was enough ; and the next moment she was strained to my heart, with a joy too deep for words.

“And when shall it be ? when shall my happiness be consummated, dear Lilian ?” I at length ventured to ask.

For a time she did not reply ; and then raising her angelic face, and fastening her soft, beaming eyes, moist with tears of joy, upon mine, she said, in a low, sweet, tremulous tone :

“*On the day when we are all made glad by the presence of my brother.*”

“Alas !” groaned I, mentally ; “that day may never come !”

CHAPTER XXX.

KEEPING MY SECRET.



It was the first day of June, in the year of our Lord 1843. Already the earth felt the genial air of summer, and looked as smiling as a gay maiden in her teens. The blade had covered the ground with a carpet of matchless green ; amid which, their lovely faces half concealed, bright flowers of a hundred varieties peeped modestly forth, to render the landscape enchanting, giving their sweet breath to a southern breeze that softly stole over them. The trees in every direction were in full foliage, and already among them could be seen green bunches of embryo fruits. It was in fact a delightful day, a delightful season of the year, and a delightful scene upon which I gazed, with feelings, alas ! that had more in them of sadness than joy.

I was still in Oregon City ; yet two months had flown since on the banks of the romantic Willamette I had offered my hand, heart and fortune to Lilian Huntly, and had been by her accepted, only to find the nuptial day prolonged to an indefinite period—the return of my friend and her brother.

I did not describe my feelings then to the reader, but they had really been very painful. I had deceived Lilian and her mother, I knew, in leading them to hope, even, for the return of Charles Huntly ; and I felt stung to the very soul as one guilty of a crime.

What should I do ? had often since been my mental question. Should I avow all to Lilian and make her wretched by destroying all hope of ever seeing Charles again ? or should I still let her remain in blissful ignorance of his fate, and look in vain to the future for the consummation of her ardent wishes ? It was a painful dilemma. The first was the most open, upright and straightforward manner of settling the matter, most undoubtedly ;

and conscience and a first impulse had urged me to it ; but then a doubt in my own mind that he was really dead—a faint, a very faint hope that he might sometime return to his friends—a loathing to inflict a wound upon the affectionate heart I loved, which time alone could heal—perhaps cause needless suffering to one who had already suffered enough—had restrained me ; and between a desire to do right, and a fear to do wrong, I had done nothing but muse abstractedly.

Thus days had rolled on, one after another, and the end of May had found me as undecided as ever ; and though daily basking in the smiles of Lilian, and listening to her artless words of musical sweetness, not even a hint had I ever thrown out regarding what I knew of her brother.

Often had she mentioned him, but always in a way to denote she scarcely had a doubt of seeing him the coming summer ; and the thought that she must be disappointed, had tended to make me sad and melancholy. I had never objected to the indefinite period fixed on for our wedding, for the simple reason that to object would have been to subject myself to an inquiry into the cause, and this I feared. What ought I to do ? The question had come up night and day, at all times and in all places, and had troubled me sorely—so much so, in fact, that I now began to fear its effects upon my constitution.

At last I resolved to tell her all ; and for this purpose I invited her one morning to our usual stroll on the banks of the Willamette.

The day was fine, and everything around beautiful.

We took our way directly to the falls, and paused upon a bluff immediately over the rolling, sparkling waters.

This bluff, which is the bank of the stream at Oregon City, varies from twenty to eighty feet in height, and, running back, forms the level upon which the town was then just beginning to be laid out.

The scene was charming, notwithstanding it was in the wilderness. A beautiful forest stretched away on

either hand ; below us rolled the river, roaring over the falls ; and on the opposite side rose similar bluffs, and another pleasant forest. It seemed a place fitted for the communion of lovers, and here Lilian and I had whiled away our happiest hours. Here I had offered her my hand, here I had been accepted, and of course the scene could not but recall pleasant associations.

Hither then we strayed ; and as we paused above the bright river, Lilian exclaimed, with a look of joy :

“Oh, it will be so delightful when Charles joins us ! Do you know what I have determined on, Frank ?”

“Surely not,” I answered.

“Do you see that level yonder (pointing down the stream), which sets off so pleasantly below this, shaded by those tall, old trees ?”

“Ay, I see, Lilian.”

“Well, there I have planned having such a picnic, on the day when—when we—”

She paused and blushed, and glanced timidly at me, as if expecting I would complete the sentence.

I did not, for my mind was busy with sad thoughts.

“Now,” thought I, “is the time to tell her all.”

But how should I begin to pain her ?

I was uneasy, and felt miserable, and doubtless looked as I felt, for the next moment she exclaimed, in some alarm :

“Why, Francis, what is the matter ? You look so pale ! Has anything happened ?”

“Nothing new.”

“What then ? You always look so pained when I allude to brother Charles ! Surely there must be some cause ! Have you kept anything hidden from me ? Speak, Francis ! You left him well, did you not ?” and she grasped my arm, and looked earnestly in my face.

“I did, Lilian.”

“Well, what then ? You must have no secrets from me now, you know.”

I would have to tell her, I thought, and there could never be a better time than this.

“Lilian,” I began, and my voice trembled as I spoke :
“Lilian, I—”

"What ho, my lovers! are you here?" shouted a merry voice. "I thought I should find you here;" and the next moment we were joined by the gay, light-hearted Eva Mortimer. "In the name of humanity," she said, as she came bounding up to us, "what makes you both look so pale? Not making love again, I hope!" and she ended with a ringing laugh, which, however pleasant it might have sounded at another time, now jarred most discordantly with the feelings of both.

"No, not exactly making love, Miss Mortimer," I answered, turning to her with a forced smile, and, if truth must be owned, rather rejoiced than otherwise that she had broken off what must have proved a painful interview.

"Well," she rejoined, playfully, brushing back her dark ringlets with one of the prettiest, white, dimpled hands in the world, "I am glad to hear that; for I feared, from your sober looks, you were either getting into a lover's quarrel, or going over a nameless scene that was enacted here some weeks ago;" and she looked meaningly, first at Lilian, who colored deeply, and then at me, who I fancied stood it like a philosopher. "Come," she added, in the same gay tone, "I have use for you both all day. We—that is I, and my good mother, and yours, Lilian, and some others—have decided on going to see a beautiful lake, which, we are told, ornaments a certain fern bluff that you see away yonder, some half a mile back of this magnificent city. City indeed!" she continued, with a curl of the lip. "Why, it might be stolen from the suburbs of Boston, or any other place of note, and never be missed. But mother would come in spite of me, and when she takes a notion into her head she must carry it out. She wishes herself back now, and I join her with all my heart; but, heighho! I suppose I shall have to spend my days here, for I see no means of getting away. But I will tease her, though—I am pledged to that—and that will be some comfort, and save me dying of *ennui*. Oregon City! Umph! I thought it would turn out to be woods before I came, and I told her so—but she would not believe me. Come, Mr. Leighton, don't be standing there looking so sober!

nor you, my bonnie Lilian. I am going to have you along; and if I don't make you laugh, why, I will turn in and cry myself. Only to think of being here without a lover! It don't matter with you, Lilian, for you have got one; but think of me—in pity do! Nobody here but some thick-headed rustics that don't know how to make love. I wish your brother would come, Lilian—I am dying to see him! He saved my life, you know; and so I am bound, by all the rules of novels, to fall in love with him out of pure gratitude."

"You will not need gratitude, I fancy," added I, with a sigh at the thought of him, "should you ever be fortunate enough to see him—for he is a noble fellow, and one I think to your liking."

"Ah!" she sighed; "you need not tell me he is a noble fellow—for none but such would have risked his life as he did for a stranger. I have been in love with him ever since I heard about it, though I had long ago given up all hope of ever seeing him."

"And he will be ready, I will vouch for him, to reciprocate the tender feeling."

"Do you think so?" she said, slightly blushing, and her eyes sparkling. "Oh, that will be so romantic! and I love romance dearly. I will have him down upon his knees at every frown; and I will frown twenty times a day, just to have him down upon his knees. Now that will be making love to some purpose, eh?" And giving vent to a ringing laugh, she added, taking my arm: "Come, don't let us keep the good people waiting, or they may get off the notion, and I would not miss seeing the lake for a costly ruby."

My design of telling a sad tale was thus broken off, and, as I said before, I was not sorry for it.

Arm in arm with the two I returned to what was denominated the village, Eva the while chatting away gayly, flying from one thing to another, but ever adroitly returning to Charles Huntly, showing that he now occupied no small share of her thoughts.

CHAPTER XXXI.

RESOLVE TO SEEK MY FRIEND.



FROM the conversation recorded in the preceding chapter, it will be seen that Eva Mortimer was a very different being from Lilian Huntly ; and as she is destined to figure somewhat conspicuously in these pages, I consider the present a good opportunity to describe her.

In person Eva Mortimer was slightly above medium, with a form well developed, and a bust of rare beauty. Her complexion was clear and dark, though scarcely sufficient to entitle her to the appellation of brunette. Her soft, hazel eyes, shaded by silken lashes, were very expressive, and could look love languishingly, or sparkle with mirth, anger, or any of the passions of impulse. Her features were regular and very prepossessing, with a nose slightly aquiline, and mouth and lips as tempting as one would care to look upon.

Her disposition accorded with her looks. At heart she was open and generous, with a desire to please and be pleased, let fortune smile or frown. Her spirits were almost ever buoyant, and it required a strong cause to depress them. Very different from some, she could not easily be brought to consider this bright earth as only a graveyard, and herself a mournful inhabitant, ever stalking among tombs. She did not believe in storm, and cloud, and dreariness, so much as in an open sky, sunshine, cheerfulness and joy. It would have required great depth of reasoning to convince her that God had placed man here expressly to mope out his days in gloom and sorrow, either real or imaginary. She did not fancy the dark side of the picture ; and, full of the poetry of an ardent temperament, there was to her in the sunshine, the breeze, the leaf, the blade, the flower, the mount, the vale, the storm, and in fact in everything of nature, something to excite joy rather than sadness. Whatever her fortune,

she took care to make the best of it and not repine. She was lively even to gayety, and could rattle on for hours in a light, frolicsome strain, calculated to mislead such as looked not below the mere surface; but those who judged Eva Mortimer by this, judged wrongly; for beneath was a heart as warm, as earnest, as pure, as true, as ever beat in the breast of woman. This was the drift, the foam, that floated along on the strong current of a noble mind.

Had you seen and listened to her in her merry moods, you would have thought perhaps she had no mind above trifles, or beyond the mere present; that she was vain and coquettish to a fault; that she would take no delight in serious meditation; and yet you could not easily have erred more in judgment.

I have seen her alone, in the night, gazing at the stars, when she thought no human eye beheld her. I have watched her musing over a flower, which she patiently dissected, as if to lay bare its mysteries; over the pebbles which she had gathered in some ramble; over a leaf, a blade of grass; in fact over whatever had chanced in her path; and all in a way to show her possessed of *mind*, and that of the highest order.

There were but few in her present locality who really knew Eva Mortimer, and none who seemed to appreciate her as did Lilian.

In their short acquaintance, these two bright beings had become *friends*; not in the cold, unmeaning term of the world—but friends sincere and true, and bound by a tie beyond the power of death itself to sever. Like the magnet and the needle had they come together, to be held by attractions peculiar to themselves. To each other their hearts were ever open; and the joys and sorrows of the one, were the joys and sorrows of the other. They talked together, walked together, read together (each had brought a few choice books), sang together, and both ever seemed happier on all occasions for the other's presence. They were nearly of the same age, of different temperaments, and united like the different strings of a harp to bring forth nothing but music. In short, they loved each other—not with the evanescent love of fiery

passion, which burns and freezes alternately—but with that deeper and truer love which springs from admiration of, and dependence on, in a measure, the qualities we do not possess ourselves. It was a holy love—the love of two fair maidens just budding into womanhood.

Of the early history of Eva Mortimer I at this time knew but little, and this I had gleaned from Lilian.

Her mother, a woman between forty and fifty years of age, was a native of England, of wealthy parentage, but not of noble birth.

Some twenty-five years before the date of these events, she had clandestinely married a French exile, apparently without name or fortune, rather for the love of romance, and because she was strongly opposed by her friends, than for any real affection which she had felt toward the individual himself.

This proceeding had so incensed her parents, that they had cast her off; but, unlike most parents in such cases, unwilling she should suffer too much, they had offered her a life annuity that would keep her above want, on condition that she should quit the country immediately and return to it no more.

To this she had readily assented; and shortly after, with her husband, had embarked for America, and had finally settled at Quebec, in Canada, where for several years they had continued to live together—though not, it must be confessed, in the most harmonious manner.

Being rather headstrong and self-willed, and withal possessed of an independence, Madame Mortimer had sought to have everything her own way, and had not scrupled occasionally to make her husband feel that he was her debtor for every luxury he enjoyed.

Of a proud spirit, and a temper somewhat irritable, he had not displayed any too much Christian humility, meekness and resignation, and many a bitter quarrel had been the consequence.

Time rolled on, and at the end of five years she had given birth to female twins. Both had been hoping for a male heir; and consequently this event, instead of mending, had rather served to widen, the breach. Quarrel had then succeeded quarrel; and as love was wanting to

harmonize two opposing spirits, it had at last been found necessary to separate.

Two years had so passed, when one morning Mortimer had come into the presence of his wife, with a letter in his hand, and had abruptly announced his intention of leaving her.

"As you like," Madame Mortimer had coolly replied.

Mortimer had turned and left her, nor had she ever beheld him since.

The night following, the twin sister of Eva had disappeared; and the most diligent inquiries, together with the offer of a large reward, had failed in restoring her to her anxious mother.

The effect of this upon Madame Mortimer had proved very severe—for she loved both her children dearly—and a nervous fever had followed and nearly cost her her life.

Soon after this she had received news of her father's death; and that, having repented of his rashness, he had left her a rich legacy, with permission to return to England.

To England therefore she went; and there had remained, superintending the education of Eva, until a desire for travel had brought her once more to this country, whither she had come in company with her daughter and a wealthy American lady, whose acquaintance had been made across the water, and who had subsequently introduced her into New York society, simply as Madame Mortimer, without a word of explanation, this being at her own earnest request.

Thus it was, as I have before mentioned, that none who had met her in society had been able to learn who she was or whence she came, and this had doubtless added to her popularity.

This was all I had been able to gather from Lilian; and all, in fact, she knew; and this had been picked up at different times, from remarks that had escaped the lips of Eva in her more communicative moods.

In person, Madame Mortimer was large, with a full, handsome countenance, expressive, black eyes, and a bearing dignified and queen-like. At heart she was

kind and affectionate ; and doubtless, had she been properly mated, would have made an exemplary wife. Her passions, when excited, were strong even to violence, with a temper haughty and unyielding to an equal, but subdued and mild to an inferior. She loved passionately, and hated bitterly. With her, as a general thing, there was no medium. She liked or disliked, and carried both to extremes. She was a woman of strong mind, much given to thought and reflection, an acute observer of everything around her, and just sufficiently eccentric to throw the freshness of originality over all she said or did. She would do what she thought was proper, without regard to the opinion of others, or to what the world would say. She had resolved on a journey to Oregon, not for any particular purpose, but merely to carry out a whim and see the country. She had done both, was dissatisfied with her present locality, and now designed returning to the States at the first favorable opportunity.

Of the fate of her brother, Lilian still remained ignorant ; for, after the interruption of Eva, I could never summon enough moral courage to again attempt the sad narration.

As time rolled on, I became more and more depressed in spirits, and more perplexed as to the course I should pursue.

It was not impossible, I began to reason, that Charles Huntly might be living ; and the more I pondered on this, the more I was inclined to believe it the case.

He had been lost mysteriously, in a part of the world notoriously infested with robbers and Indians. If captured by the former, there was no argument against the supposition that he had been plundered and sold into slavery. If by the latter, might he not have been adopted by some tribe, and now be a prisoner ? In either case, was I not in duty bound to go in quest of him ? and, if found, to rescue him from a horrible doom, either by ransom or force ?

"At all events," I said to myself, "I can but fail, and *may* succeed."

On leaving home, I had supplied myself with a large

amount of gold to meet all contingencies, and but little of this had been expended. I could, perhaps, engage a party, for a reasonable sum, to accompany me; and this, after duly weighing all the circumstances, I now decided to attempt. I would let Lilian and the others suppose I had gone home, and that I should probably return with Charles Huntly.

Having settled the matter in my own mind, I resolved on immediate action, and for this purpose called Teddy aside to communicate my intention.

"Teddy," I began, gravely, "did you love your former master?"

"Me masther?" repeated the Irishman, with a look of curious inquiry; "and sure of who is't ye're spaking, yer honor?"

"Of Charles Huntly."

"Did I love him, is't? Faith, and does a snapping turtle love to bite, or a drunkard to drink, that ye ax me that now? Love him? Troth, and was he livin', I'd go to the ind of the world and jump off, jist to plase him, and so I would."

"It may be, Teddy, you can serve him more effectually than by a proceeding so dangerous."

"Sarve him, is't! Och, now, I'd be afther knowing of that same!"

"I have taken a fancy into my head that he is living."

"Mother of Moses! ye don't say the likes!" exclaimed the Hibernian, holding up both hands in astonishment. "Ye's joking, sure, your honor?"

"No, Teddy, I am serious as a judge. I have always had some faint doubts of his death, and now these doubts have grown strong enough to induce me to set off in search of him;" and I proceeded to give my reasons.

"Ah, sure," said Teddy, as I concluded, "this is a happy day for me mother's son, if nothing comes on't but parthing wid—wid—"

"But, Teddy, I had designed taking you along."

"And sure, Misther Leighton, isn't it going I is wid yees now? D'ye think I'd be afther staying behind, like a spalpeen, and yees away afther Misther Huntly? pace

to his ashes ! barring that he's got no ashes at all, at all, but is raal flish and blood, like your own bonny silf, that's one of the kindest gintlemen as iver wore out shoe-maker's fixings and made the tailor blush wid modesty for the ixcellent fit of his coat !"

"But you spoke of parting, Teddy?"

"Ah, troth, and yees a gallant yoursilf, your honor, and not sae it was a wee bit of a famale parthing I's min-tioning, jist?"

"Female parting ! I do not understand you."

Here Teddy scratched his head, and looked not a little confused.

"Why, ye sae, your honor," he replied, hesitatingly, "ye sae the womens (Heaven bliss their darling sowls !) is all lovable crathurs ; and it's mesilf that likes to maat 'em wheriver I goes ; but somehow, your honor, a chap's like to be thinking of one, more in particular by raason of his nathur ; and that's the case wid mesilf now and Molly Stubbs, that lives yonder, barring that it's hardly living at all that she's a-doing in this wild counthry."

The truth flashed upon me at once. One of the settlers, who had come here in advance of my friends, had a large, buxom, rosy-cheeked daughter of eighteen, who went by the euphonious appellation of Molly Stubbs—sometimes, Big Molly—and I now remembered having seen Teddy idling about the premises, though at the time I had no suspicion of the real cause.

"And so, Teddy, you have been making love, eh?"

"Divil a bit, your honor."

"How ? what ?"

"No ! ye sae it was all made to me hand, and I've ounly been acting it out, jist."

"Aha ! exactly. And so you think you can part with your *belle ami*, eh?"

"And sure if it's Molly Stubbs you maan by that Lathin, it's mesilf that can say the farewell handsome, now."

"Well, make your parting short, and then see to having the horses got ready, for in less three hours we must be in our saddles."

With this I turned away ; and with slow steps, and a

heart by no means the lightest, I sought the residence of Lilian, to communicate the unpleasant intelligence that in a few minutes we must part, perhaps to meet no more in this world.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SAD FAREWELLS.



AS I neared the residence of Mrs. Huntly and Lilian (which had also been mine for some months), for the purpose of bidding my friends another long adieu, I heard the merry voice and ringing laugh of Eva Mortimer.

Another time this would have been music to my ears ; but now my spirits were greatly depressed, and I was not in a mood to appreciate it.

The cabin—it would scarcely bear a more exalted title—seemed surrounded with an air of gloom. It was as good as any, better than most, which formed the village of Oregon City ; but yet what a place to be the abode of those who had been used all their lives to the luxurious mansions of wealth ! and I could not avoid making a comparison between the condition of the tenants now, and when I had approached to bid them farewell some three years before—nor of thinking with what Christian-like resignation they had borne, and still bore, their misfortunes.

Their present little dwelling was built of unhewn logs, whose crevices were filled with clay, had a thatched roof, puncheon floors, and three apartments. One of these had been assigned to Teddy and myself, another to Lilian and her mother, and the third answered the treble uses of parlor, sitting-room and kitchen. A few beds and bedding, a table, one or two chairs, together with a few benches, and the most common household utensils, comprised the principal furniture.

And this was the abode of the lovely and once wealthy heiress, Lilian Huntly ! And she could seem contented here ! What a happy spirit, to adapt itself to all circumstances—to blend itself, if I may so express it, with every fortune !

With this reflection I crossed the threshold, and beheld Lilian and Eva in gay conversation, and Mrs. Huntly seated by the table, perusing a book.

Both the young ladies turned to me as I entered, and Eva at once exclaimed :

“So, Mr. Francis, you have just come in time—we have it all settled.”

“May I inquire what ?” returned I, gravely.

“May you inquire what ?” she repeated, with a playful curl of the lip. “Did you ever see such a starch, ministerial look, Lilian ?—as grave is he as a sexton. Why one would suppose all his friends were dead, and he had come to invite us to the funeral. Heigh-ho ! if ever I get a lover, he shall wear no such look as that ; if he do, it will be at the risk of having his hair combed and powdered, I assure you.”

“But I have reason for looking grave,” I replied.

“Eh ! what !” cried Eva, changing instantly her whole expression and manner. “Surely you have no bad news for us ?” and she approached and laid her hand upon my arm, with a troubled look ; while Lilian sunk down upon a seat, as if she had some sad foreboding, and Mrs. Huntly turned her eyes upon me inquiringly.

“Give yourselves no alarm,” I hastened to reply. “I have only come to say that we must separate for a time.”

“Indeed !” exclaimed Eva, looking seriously.

“You have heard tidings of Charles ?” added Mrs. Huntly.

I glanced at Lilian ; but she said not a word, though all color had forsaken her features.

“No, I have not heard from Charles,” I rejoined, in answer to Mrs. Huntly ; “but I presume I shall ere I return.”

‘Good Heavens ! then you are going far?’ cried Eva, in astonishment.

‘I contemplate making a journey to the East, and may meet Charles on the way—in which case I shall return at once—otherwise I may be absent all summer.’

‘Why, Francis, what has made you resolve thus so suddenly?’ inquired Mrs. Huntly. ‘How are we to do without you? I thought—(she paused and glanced toward Lilian, who had turned her head aside and seemed deeply affected)—that—that—you intended to pass the summer with us?’

‘Cruel man!’ said Eva, in a whisper; ‘how can you leave the sweetest being on earth? Oh, you men!’ And then she continued aloud: ‘I wish we were all going with you! Can you not take us all along?’

‘Why, I fear it would not be safe.’

‘As safe as it is here, I am certain. Surely we could not be more than killed if we went; and who knows but some of these Indians, that are in the habit of visiting our great city here, may take a notion we have lived long enough, and so murder us all—or marry us, which would be quite as bad! But whoever knew a gentleman gallant enough to do what was asked of him? Ah! I see—you don’t even listen now; your thoughts are all with somebody else; and so I will retire. Let me know when it is over, as I wish to bid you adieu;’ and she darted out of the room.

Mrs. Huntly was on the point of interrogating me further; but perceiving, by a sign from Lilian, that the latter wished to see me alone, she made some excuse, and went into an adjoining apartment. The moment she had disappeared, Lilian sprung up and flew into my arms.

‘Is this true, Francis?’ she exclaimed. ‘Are you really going to leave us?’

‘I fear I must for a time,’ I said, in a not very firm voice.

‘A long time then,’ sighed the fair girl; ‘a long time if you are going East. Oh, Francis, I did not think we should part so soon! What have you heard? Some-

thing, surely—for you have never intimated this before—and you would not deceive one who loves you?”

This was said so touchingly, with such *naïveté*, that for a time I only replied by pressing her more closely to my heart, and imprinting a kiss upon her quivering lips.

“I cannot tell my Lilian everything,” I at length made answer. “Suffice, that I have important reasons for going; and sometime, God willing, you shall know all. My resolution to leave was formed to-day, and to-day we must part.”

“To-day?” she gasped; and I felt her whole form quiver like a reed shaken by the wind. “Oh, no! not to-day, Francis! That would be too much—too sudden! You must not go to-day!”

“Why not, dearest? I shall return one day the sooner for it doubtless; and it will be as hard to part to-morrow as to-day.”

“But it is so sudden—so unexpected!” she pleaded. “Delay till to-morrow, Francis!”

“Well, anything to please you,” and I stamped the promise with a seal of love. “Be cheerful as you can in my absence, Lilian; and when I return with your brother—”

“Oh, then you are going to find him!” she exclaimed, interrupting me. “That return will be joyful indeed! Poor Charles! If you do not meet him on the way, most likely you will in Boston. Cheer him all you can, Francis! and tell him we are as happy as circumstances will allow us to be.”

“Beg pardon, your honor!” said the voice of Teddy at the moment, startling Lilian, like a frightened roe, from my arms; “beg pardon for interrupting yees!—but the baast ye buyed, this while ago, is not inywhere to my knowing.”

“Never mind, Teddy; go and hunt it. It must be about, unless the Indians have stolen it; in which case I must get another. Hunt for it—I shall not leave to-day.”

“Troth, thin, I’ll have another parthing mesilf, jist!” returned Teddy, as he disappeared with a pleased look.

At this moment Mrs. Huntly, hearing another voice,

reappeared, and my *tête-à-tête* with Lilian was for the time broken off.

The former had a great many questions to ask me—why I had decided leaving so suddenly—when I expected to reach Boston, and the like—so that I had no little difficulty in replying in a way not to commit myself.

Then she had letters to write to her friends; and Lilian had letters to prepare also; and the news of my departure having circulated quickly through the village, numbers called to see me, to send messages and letters to their native land; so that what with listening to their requests, to an extra amount of advice as to the proper mode of conducting myself under all circumstances, and attending to my own affairs, I was kept busy all day, without the opportunity of another private interview with Lilian.

A fine horse, which I had purchased a few days before of an Indian, was lost—the late owner I suppose, or some of his friends, having thought it best to recover the animal without troubling me in the matter at all. Consequently another beast was to be procured; and as this was for Teddy, I allowed him to make his own selection—the one I had ridden hither still being in my possession.

At last, everything being prepared, I retired to my couch, heartily fatigued with my day's work.

But thought was too busy to allow me much sleep; and I question if at least *one* other did not pass a restless night from the same cause; for, on appearing in the morning, I noticed that the features of Lilian were very pale, and her eyes red as if from recent weeping.

But she seemed firm, ready to endure the separation, and uttered not a single word of complaint.

I could have loved her for this, if for nothing else—her conduct was so womanly and sensible.

She did not feel the less, that she did not show it more, I knew. She was about to part with one she had loved from childhood—one to whom her heart and hand were pledged—and this in a strange, wild country, for a long separation, full of peril to both, with no certainty of ever seeing him again. It could not but be painful to

her in any situation—doubly so in the one she was placed—and I fancy I appreciated her noble firmness as it deserved.

The countenances of Mrs. Huntly, Madame Mortimer, Eva, and many others, all were grave; and I read in their looks unfeigned sorrow at my close-coming departure.

The morning meal was eaten in silence, as all were too sad and full of deep thought for unnecessary conversation. Ere it was finished, my friends had all collected to bid me farewell and God speed; and the announcement by Teddy, that the horses were ready, was the signal for me to begin the parting scene.

Commencing with those I cared least about, I shook each heartily by the hand, and passed from one to the other as rapidly as possible.

“Francis Leighton,” said Madame Mortimer, when I came to her, and her hand pressed mine warmly, and her voice trembled as she spoke, “remember that to you and your friend my daughter owes her life, and I a debt of gratitude that may never be canceled. If my prayers for your safe and happy return be of any avail, you have them. God bless you, sir! and remember, that, whatever may happen in this changing world, in me, while living, you have a warm friend; and (approaching and whispering in my ear), so has Lilian and her mother. While I have aught, they shall never want. Farewell, my friend—farewell; but, I hope, only for a time.”

Madame Mortimer stepped aside, and I turned to Eva. There was no merriment in her look now—nothing light upon her tongue.

“You have heard the words of mother,” she said, impressively. “They are not meaningless. To you and your friend I am indebted for my life. My conversation at times may have seemed light and trifling; but notwithstanding, Francis, I would have you believe there is a *heart* beneath all, that does not overlook the merits of its friends, nor feel lightly for their welfare. When you see your friend, tell him that he is prayed for daily, by one who, though she never saw him, can never cease to remember him. Adieu! and may God bear you safely

through all peril!" and she turned away, as if to hide a tear.

"Francis," said Mrs. Huntly, striving to command her voice, which trembled not a little, as she held both my hands in hers: "Francis, it is hard—very, very hard—to part with you. But I suppose I must, and I hope it is all for the best. I have had so much trouble within a few years—have seen so many of those I once supposed my friends forsake me—that it really becomes grievous to part with any of the few I have tried and not found wanting. But go, Francis, and God protect you! Should you be fortunate enough to meet with dear Charles—(here her voice faltered to a pause, and she was forced to dash away the tears dimming her eyes)—tell—tell him all. Break the matter gently, if he does not already know it—and—and comfort him the best way you can. My love—my deepest, undying love—to your parents and all my friends. There—there—I can say no more—no more. Go, Francis, and God's blessing and mine attend you! Good-bye! farewell!" and, shaking my hands warmly, with her head averted, she dropped them and disappeared into another apartment, seemingly too much affected to tarry longer in my presence.

With a proper delicacy, for which I gave them ample credit, one after another departed, until I was left alone with Lilian.

While these several partings were taking place, she had remained seated, watching the whole proceedings, with what feelings I leave lovers to judge.

I now turned to her, and felt that the grand trial was at hand, and my heart seemed to be in my very throat.

Her sweet countenance was pale and death-like, her very lips were white, and her eyes full of tears. There was no shyness, no trembling, no apparent excitement. She seemed, as her heavenly blue eyes fixed themselves upon mine, rather a beautiful figure, cut from the purest marble, cold and motionless, than a living, breathing, human being. But, oh! what thoughts, what agonies,

were rending that soul within ! mastered only by a most powerful will !

With a step none of the firmest, I approached and took a seat by her side, and laid my hand upon hers.

“Lilian,” I said, in a scarcely articulate voice ; “Lilian, the time has come to—to—part.”

She did not reply in words—she could not ; but she rose to her feet, her ivory arms encircled my neck, and her feelings found vent in tears upon my heaving breast.

Smile, if you will, reader—you who have passed the romantic bounds of a first pure and holy passion, and become identified with the cares and dross of a money-getting, matter-of-fact, dollar-and-cent-life—smile if you will, as your eye chances upon this simple passage ; and curl your lip in proud disdain of what you now consider foolish days of love-sick sentimentality ; but remember, withal, that, in your long career of painful experience, you can refer to no period when you felt more happiness, more unadulterated joy, than that when the being of your first ambition and love lay trustingly in your arms. It is a point in the life of each and all who have experienced it (and to none other are these words addressed), which can never be erased from the tablet of memory ; and though in after years we may affect to deride it as the weakness of youth, it will come upon us in our reflective moments, like a warm sunshine suddenly bursting upon a late cold and gloomy landscape ; and insensibly, as it were, our spirits will be borne away, to live over again, though briefly, the happiest moments of our existence. The man who has passed the prime and vigor of manhood without ever having felt this—without this to look back to—I pity ; for he has missed the purest enjoyment offered to mortal ; and his whole path of life must have been through a sterile desert, without one green blade or flower to relieve its barren waste.

For some moments the heart of Lilian beat rapidly against mine, and her tears flowed hot and fast. I did not attempt to restrain the latter, for I knew they would bring relief to an overcharged soul, and I rejoiced that

she could weep. At length they ceased, and Lilian spoke.

"I will not detain you longer, dear Francis! For you and I, who know each other so well, words are idle and unmeaning, or at least unexpressive of our feelings. Avoid danger for your own sake, and for the sake of her who loves you; and do not forget that she will count the days, the hours, ay, the *minutes*, of your absence."

"I will not, dearest Lilian!" I exclaimed, straining her to my breast, and pressing my lips again and again to hers. "I will not forget there lives an angel to make happy my return; and God send my return may make her happy also! Adieu, dearest—take heart—do not despond—and Heaven grant our meeting may be soon! There, God bless you! and holy angels guard you!" and, taking a farewell salute, I gently seated her as before, and rushed from the cottage.

Two fiery horses stood saddled and bridled at the door, pawing the earth impatiently; and snatching the bridle of one from the hand of Teddy, I vaulted into the saddle.

The next minute I was dashing away at a dangerous speed, but one that could scarcely keep pace with my thoughts.



CHAPTER XXXIII.

OUR PERILS BEGIN.



WITH the mind completely engrossed, the body often acts mechanically, or by instinct, and performs, without our knowledge at the time, exactly what reason would have dictated; and when some trifling circumstance recalls us to ourselves, we arouse as from a dream, and are surprised at what has been accomplished during our brief alienation.

So was it with myself in the present instance.

On, on I sped, as if riding for life, my hand firmly upon the rein, guiding unerringly my high-mettled beast, and yet unconscious of anything external, with thoughts wild and painful rushing through my brain.

How long or far I had ridden thus, I do not exactly know, though miles now lay between me and Oregon City ; nor how much longer I should have continued at the same break-neck speed, had my horse not stumbled, and thus broken the monotony of a steady ride by unseating and nearly throwing me over his head.

Recovering my position, and reining my beast to a halt, I found him covered with foam, and very much blown from his late run ; and that I was upon a narrow upland prairie, which stretched away before me for several miles, fringed on either hand, at no great distance, with a beautiful wood.

“Where am I?” was my first involuntary exclamation ; “how did I get here with a whole neck ? and where is Teddy ?”

The last question found a more ready answer than either of the preceding, in a shout from the veritable Teddy O’Lagherty himself.

I looked behind and beheld him coming as if on a race with death for the last half hour of his existence. His appearance was not a little ludicrous. His body was bent forward at an angle of forty-five degrees, so as to allow him to grasp the mane of the beast—his only hope—his feet having slipped from the stirrups, which were dangling against the animal’s flanks, and serving the purpose of spurs—while his hat, for security being held in his teeth, smothered the shouts he was making to attract my attention. Add to this, that the horse had no guide but his own will, that at every spring Teddy bounced from the saddle to the imminent danger of his neck, and greatly to the aid of his digestive organs, and an idea of the discomfiture of the poor fellow may be formed, as his horse dashed up alongside of mine and came to a dead halt.

It is said there is but one short step from the sublime to the ridiculous, and I certainly felt the force of the

proverb on the present occasion. I had been half mad with distracting thoughts; but everything was now forgotten; and I burst forth in a roar of laughter, such as I am certain had never startled those solitudes before.

"Be the howly Moses!" cried Teddy, regaining an upright position, with a face the hue of a boiled lobster; "is ye mad now, ye divil?—beg pardon!—your honor, I maan. Jabers! what a ride! Och! I'm done for—claan murdered intirely—all pumice from me toes upward, barring me body and head-piece, jist."

"Why, Teddy," returned I, as soon as I could get calm enough to command my voice, "what new feature of horsemanship is this you have adopted? I am sure you would make your fortune in any circus, with such a heroic display of your animal capacities."

"Agh! ye may laugh and be d—plased to yees; but it's me mother's own son as feels more like crying, so it is! Fortune, is it, ye mintioned? Be howly St. Christopher! it's not mesilf that ud do the likes agin for twinty fortunes. Och! I'm killed intirely—all barring the braathing, that lingers still."

"Well, well, Teddy, I trust you will not have to repeat it," pursued I, laughing still. "But, come—where do you think we are?"

"Think, is it? Ye ax me to think? Sure, divil of a think I've got in me now! I lift it all on the road, that was no road at all, but the worst traveled counthry I iver put eyes on. We may be among the Hindoo haythen, for all me knows conthrawise; for not a blissed thing did I sae on the journey, but r-rocks, traas and stumps, and the divil knows what all, and thim a-going so fast I couldn't git time to say good-bye to 'em."

To the best of my judgment, we had come about five miles, in a direction due east.

Far in the distance before me, I now beheld the lofty, snow-crowned peak of Mount Hood; and toward this, without further delay, we bent our steps, at a pace strongly contrasting with the speed which had borne us hither.

"Why did you not call to me, when you saw me riding at a rate so fearful?" I inquired.

"Call, is it?" replied Teddy. "Faith! jist ax me lungs if I didn't call, till me breath quit coming for the strain upon 'em."

"And so you couldn't make me hear, eh?"

"Make the dead hear! Och! I might as well av called to a graveyard, barring the looks of the thing. Was yees mad, your honor?"

"Oh, no, Teddy—only a little excited at parting with my friends."

"Agh! thim same parthings is mighty har-r-d, now, so they is!" rejoined Teddy, with a sigh.

"So you can speak from experience, eh?"

"Be me troth, can I, now; and so can Molly Stubbs—the swaat crathur that she is."

"Did it break her heart, Teddy?"

"It's not asy for me to say, your honor; but it broke her gridiron, and the ounly one she had at that, poor dear!"

"Her gridiron?" I exclaimed, struggling to repress my risible faculties and keep a grave face, for I saw Teddy was in sober earnest, and totally unaware that there was anything ludicrous in his remark. "How did it affect the gridiron, Teddy?"

"Why, ye sae now, she was jist holding it betwaan her two fingers, and fixing for a fry maybe, whin up I comes, and tapping her under the chin, by raason of our ould acquaintance, I sez:

"'It's a blissed day I saw ye first, me darling.'

"'That it was, Misther Teddy,' sez she.

"'I wish that first maating could last foriver,' sez I.

"'And so do I,' sez she.

"'But it won't,' sez I; and thin I sighed, and she axed me what was the mather.

"'Oh, worra! worra!' I sez; 'it's about to part we is, Molly, dear.'

"'Ye don't say the likes!' sez she; and thin down come the gridiron, as if the Ould Scratch was a riding it, smash upon the stone harth, and into me arms pitched Molly, wid a flood of tears that made me look wathery for a long occasion. Now it's not what we did aftherwards I'm going to till, at all, at all; but whin we both

come sensible, our eyes besaw the gridiron all broke, and not wort a ha'pence. Molly cried, she did, and I gin her a month's wages to ase her conscience. Musha, now, but parthings is har-r-d, so they is."

In this and like manner I managed to relieve my mind of many gloomy thoughts, which otherwise must have painfully depressed it.

I had parted the second time with Lilian, for a journey equally as full of peril as the first, and, if anything, of a more indefinite character.

I was going in search of my lost friend, it is true ; but what little chance had I, I thought, when I came to look at it soberly, of finding him, even if alive. I might travel thousands on thousands of miles—be months, even years, on the search—and yet be no nearer revealing his locality than when I set out. If living, it was a mere chance if we should ever meet again, and nothing perhaps but a kind Providence could bring us together.

As may be inferred, when I quitted my friends in Oregon City I had no definite plan arranged ; and now that I was really on the journey, the question naturally arose as to what I should do, how first to proceed, and where to begin. I had resolved on engaging assistance, but where was this to be found ?

For some time I puzzled my own brain with the matter, and then referred it to Teddy.

Though brought up in an humble sphere of life, with very little education, Teddy was nevertheless a keen, shrewd observer, and of excellent judgment in matters coming within the range of his intellect and experience ; and accordingly I relied much upon his advice.

Having heard the case fully stated, with the gravity of a judge, and asked several pertinent questions, he replied, that our best course, in his humble opinion, was to continue our present route as far as Fort Hall, where we would be likely to augment our number to our satisfaction, and could then proceed in a southerly direction and be guided by succeeding events.

As this tallied exactly with my own views, the plan was quickly adopted, and I rode forward with the great

mental relief that I now had a fixed purpose, whether right or wrong.

For several miles our course lay over the upland prairie I have mentioned ; then the ground changed and became more rolling ; and this in turn gave place to hills, sometimes sparsely and sometimes densely wooded, interspersed with rocks, gullies and deep ravines, that greatly impeded our progress.

We halted to noon in a little valley, through which, with a roaring sound over its rocky bed, dashed a bright stream of pure water, on whose banks grew rich, green grass, of such luxuriance as to satisfy the appetites of our animals in a very short time.

While partaking of some plain food, of which we had a small store, we amused ourselves by overhauling our rifles, examining their priming, as well as our other weapons and ammunition, and seeing that everything was in a proper condition to meet danger.

Scarcely was this over, when in a whisper Teddy called my attention to a fine, fat buck, which was trotting along within rifle shot.

Quick as thought I drew up my piece and fired.

The animal instantly bounded forward a short distance, reeled, and fell upon its side.

The next moment we were on our way to examine the carcass, and take from it the most suitable portions for our wants.

We had scarcely proceeded twenty paces, when Teddy, grasping my arm, exclaimed :

“ Injins, be jabers ! ”

And sure enough, just issuing from a clump of bushes, on the opposite side of the valley, distant less than two hundred yards, were six half-naked savages, armed, two of them, with rifles or muskets, and the others with bows and arrows.

As it was impossible to divine their intentions, only by their acts, and as they made straight toward us, I snatched Teddy's rifle from his hands, and, ordering him to load mine as quick as possible, raised it to my shoulder, determined, should they prove hostile, to sell

my life dearly, and die, if I must, with the satisfaction of having done my duty in self-defense.

Perceiving my movement, they came to a halt, and made me friendly signs, by extending their open hands and then placing them on their hearts.

Dropping the muzzle of my rifle, I did the same, and then waited for them to come up—though, it must be confessed, with not the most faith imaginable in their amicable professions.

However, I kept well on my guard ; and by the time they had shortened the first-mentioned distance between us by a hundred paces, Teddy coolly announced that two bullets were at their service at any moment they might choose.

As they approached us, I made them out, by their costume and paint, to belong to the Chinook tribe, whose grounds lie due north of Oregon City, on the opposite side of the Columbia River. I had frequently seen more or less of them in the village ; and had, in fact, purchased the horse, mentioned as being stolen, from one of their tribe ; so that I now feared less a design upon my life than upon my property.

The party in question were all inferior beings, both in size and appearance ; but one seemed superior to the others, and possessed of command.

He approached me in advance of his companions, and held out his hand, which I accepted and shook in a friendly manner.

He next proceeded to Teddy, and each in turn followed his example.

When all had done, the chief addressed me in broken English :

“Where you come?”

“From the village, yonder,” I replied, pointing with my finger toward Oregon City.

“Where go?”

“Away beyond the mountains,” and I pointed eastward.

“Good muskee (musket) got?”

I nodded in the affirmative.

“Good hoss got?”

I nodded again.

"Good present got, eh? poor Injin, eh?"

"I have nothing but some tobacco I can spare," I answered—of which I still had a pretty good supply.

"Ugh! backee good!" rejoined the chief, with a smile.

This was in my sack on my horse, and I was not sorry of an excuse to get to him without showing myself suspicious of my new acquaintances; for I had noticed many a wistful glance cast in that direction; and I feared lest, presuming on our weakness, they might think proper to take our animals and leave us to make the best of it.

Accordingly I informed the savage where the article was, and that I must go alone and get it.

"Why me no go?" he asked.

"Then your followers must stay behind."

"Why dey no go?" he inquired, a little angrily as I thought.

"Because I shall not permit it!" I replied, decisively.

"Ugh! we so—you so!" he rejoined, holding up first six, and then two fingers, to indicate the number of each party. "We strong—you weak—we go, eh?" and he made a step forward.

In an instant the muzzle of my rifle was pointed at his breast, and my finger on the trigger; a movement imitated by Teddy, who quickly covered another.

"Another step, chief," I said, "and you are a dead man!"

"Back, ye divils—ye dirthy blaggards!—don't yees hear the gintleman spaking to yees now?" shouted Teddy.

This peremptory decision had a salutary effect upon the white-livered knaves, who instantly shrunk cowering back—the chief at once exclaiming, in a deprecating tone:

"No shoot. We no go. You go."

Fearing treachery, we instantly started for our horses, keeping our faces to our foes, and our rifles leveled, prepared for the worst.

Having secured a few plugs of tobacco, we both

mounted and returned to the savages, among whom I made an immediate distribution.

The chief thanked me, and said they would now go home.

Accordingly, the whole party set off in one direction, and we in another, rifles in hand.

We had scarcely gone twenty paces, when crack went a musket behind us, and a ball whizzed over my head.

"The treacherous scoundrels!" I exclaimed; and wheeling my horse as I spoke, I beheld the whole six running and dodging for their lives.

Singling out the villain that had fired at us, I drew up my rifle and pulled trigger.

The next moment he lay howling in the dust, deserted by his cowardly friends, whose speed seemed greatly accelerated by this event.

Teddy would have gone back for his scalp; but this I would not permit, both on account of its barbarity, and because by delay we might encounter another party.

Setting spurs to our horses, therefore, we dashed rapidly away, leaving our game and foes behind us, and congratulating ourselves upon our providential escape.

For the rest of the day our progress was by no means slow, though the traveling at times was most execrable.

The sun was already throwing a long shade to the eastward, when, ascending a rough, stony ridge, which we had been forced to do circuitously, we beheld below us a beautiful plain, of miles in length and breadth, along the eastern portion of which towered the lofty Cascade Mountains, with the everlasting snow-crowned Mount Hood rising grandly above all, till lost beyond the clouds, glittering like a pinnacle of burnished silver in the rays of the sinking sun. It was a sublime and beautiful scene for the painter and poet, and for many minutes I paused and gazed upon it with feelings of reverence and awe for the great Author of a work so stupendous.

Descending to the base of the hill, we found a suitable place and encamped. Though greatly fatigued, I did not rest well; and either my thoughts, or the dismal

howlings of surrounding wolves, or both, combined with other circumstances, kept me awake the most of the night.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A FRENCH AND IRISH QUARREL.



EARLY the following morning we were on our feet ; and, having partaken of a slight repast, we mounted and set off toward Mount Hood.

The traveling was now good, being over a rolling prairie, which, as we neared this colossal erection of nature, gradually became more and more level, so that, our horses being refreshed and full of fire, our speed was all that could be desired even by the most impatient.

Before noon we reached the base of Mount Hood ; and if I had thought it sublime at a distance, I now *felt*, as it were, its sublimity in an awful degree. Up, up, up it rose, until my eyes became strained to trace its glistening outline in the clear, blue ether. Its base was surrounded with sand, dead trees and broken rocks, which had accumulated there, perhaps, by the torrents of ages, as they had rushed and roared down its jagged sides. For a considerable distance above the plain it was well timbered ; then came a long stretch of green grass ; then a long barren spot ; and then commenced the snow and ice, which rose far beyond the ordinary height of the clouds ; the whole combined, forming a spectacle of which the pen can convey no adequate idea. To the right and left stretched away the Cascades, which, stupendous themselves, seemed as molehills in compare with Mount Hood. Far to the south rose the lofty peak of Mount Jefferson ; and as far to the north, on the other side of the Columbia, that of Mount St. Helens.

Having gazed upon the scene to my satisfaction, I

turned my horse to the right, and began my ascent up a valley, formed by the partial meeting of two hills, and down the very bed of which roared a sparkling streamlet.

The further I ascended, the more wild became the scene, the more precipitous and dangerous the path. In fact, on three occasions, we were obliged to dismount and lead our horses for a considerable distance, and once our steps had to be retraced for half a mile, in order to pass around a frightful chasm. Near the summit of the ridge we came upon a fine spring and an abundance of grass. Here we encamped for the night, during which I slept soundly.

The following day was cold and stormy, with sleet and snow.

This may surprise the reader who bears in mind that it was now June; but snow-storms on the mountains are not regulated altogether by the seasons, and are frequently known to occur in one part of the country, while in another, not ten miles distant, the heat may be excessive.

As all are aware, the higher we ascend, the colder the atmosphere; and on many high mountains, in southern climes, there may be all kinds of temperatures, from the torrid to the frigid—from the valley of dates, figs and oranges, to the peaks of never-melting ice and snow—and this within the distance of five or ten miles.

Ere we raised our camp, I shot a mountain goat, being the first game we had killed since the buck of unfavorable memory.

Of this we prepared our breakfast, and also put a few choice pieces in our "possibles," leaving the balance to the wolves; which, in justice to the appreciation they showed thereof, I may say was nothing but a pile of shining bones ere we were fairly out of sight.

I now consulted an excellent map, which I had procured from one of the emigrants, and, referring to my compass, laid my course a little north of east, so as to strike the Dalles of Columbia, and thus the most traveled route to and from Oregon City.

The day, as I have said, being stormy, and our route

lying over a wild, bleak country, served not a little to depress the spirits of both Teddy and myself.

Nothing of consequence occurred through the day to distract our thoughts from their gloomy channel, and but little was said by either.

By riding hard, we gained the Dalles that night, and encamped on the banks of the Columbia.

Eager to arrive at Fort Hall, we again pushed forward on the succeeding day, and, following up the Columbia, reached Fort Walla Walla on the third from our quitting the Dalles, without any events worthy of particular note.

This fortress, constructed on the plan of Fort Laramie, described in a former chapter, I shall pass without notice, other than to say that it contained a small garrison of resolute and daring adventurers, or rather mountaineers and their squaw wives, who preferred passing their lives here in comparative ease, at good wages, to privations and perils of trapping in the wilderness.

Here I found a number of hardy fellows, who had lately "come in," and who were preparing to set off again for the Blue Mountains—some to hunt for game in the forests, and others to trap in the streams.

Here were also several friendly Indians (friendly through fear of the whites), the usual number of traders, peddlers, one or two land speculators and fur company agents, and one French *voyageur*—all more or less engaged in drinking, trafficking and gambling, the usual routine of a gathering of this kind.

Thinking it possible to raise a party here, I made a proposition to several, but found all had prior engagements.

I next made some inquiries concerning Black George; and learned, much to my satisfaction, that he had been seen quite recently on the Blue Mountains; and that in all probability I should find him at Fort Bois, or Fort Hall, as he was then slowly taking his way eastward.

"If you desire an excellent guide," said an agent to me, "let me recommend to you Pierre Boreaux; who, though somewhat eccentric at times, you will find most

faithful in the discharge of his duty. I have tried him, sir, and know."

"Just what I desire," I replied.

"Come, then," he said; and taking me aside, he presented me to the individual in question, who was none other than the French *voyageur* previously mentioned.

He was a small, dapper personage, very neat in his appearance, with a keen, restless black eye, and a physiognomy more inclined to merriment than melancholy. His age was about forty, though he ever took pains to appear much younger. His *penchant* was for the wild and daring, and never was he so well contented as when engaged in some perilous enterprise. This, taken in connection with his jovial turn of mind, may at first seem paradoxical; but it must be remembered, that most persons incline less to their likes than their opposites; and that the humorist is the man who seldom smiles, while the man of gravest sayings may be literally a laughing philosopher. He was much addicted, too, to taking snuff, of which he always managed to have a good stock on hand, so that his silver box and handkerchief were in requisition on almost all occasions. He spoke with great volubility, in broken English, generally interlarded with French, accompanied with all the peculiar shrugs and gesticulations of his countrymen. He was, in short, a serio-comical, singular being, of whom I can convey no better idea than to let him speak and act for himself.

"Ah, Monsieur," he said, in reply to my salutation, taking a huge pinch of snuff the while and bowing very politely; "ver moche happee make you acquaintones. Vill you 'ave von—vot you call him—happenese, eh?—to take von leettle—I forgot him—so—(putting his thumb and finger together, to indicate a pinch)—avec moi, eh?"

"Thank you," I returned, "I never use the article in that shape."

"Ver sorre hear him. Vous remembre le grand Empereur Napoleone, eh?"

"Ay."

"Ah! von plus great sheneral him. He take snoof,

eh? Vell, you speak now—you—you—vot you call him—bussiness, eh?"

"I wish to engage you," I replied, "to go on a journey full of peril in the capacity of a guide."

"Ou allez-vous?"

"How?"

"Ah, pardonnez-moi! I say, vere you go?"

"To Mexico, perhaps."

"Oui, Monsieur—I shall be vere moche delight—I certainment assure you. Ven you go, eh?"

"I leave here, *en route* for Fort Hall, at daylight to-morrow."

Here the Frenchman took one or two hasty pinches of his favorite, and, closing his box, said:

"Von leetle absence, Monsieur; I sall 'ave von ver moche pleasure;" and off he skipped, as gay as a lark, to prepare himself for the journey.

At daylight on the succeeding morning the Frenchman was at his post, well mounted on a full-blooded Indian pony, armed to the teeth, and really looking quite the warrior.

Three minutes later we had all passed the gate and were speeding away.

This was the first meeting between Teddy and Pierre; and I soon became aware it was anything but a pleasant one, particularly on the part of Teddy, who cast many a furtive glance upon the other, expressive of dislike.

What this arose from—whether from jealousy, national prejudice, or contempt for the inferior proportions of Pierre—I was at a loss to determine. Never before had I seen animosity to a fellow-traveler so strongly depicted on the features of the faithful Teddy. It might be he fancied the Frenchman of equal grade with himself, and was jealous of his supplanting him in my favor, and this seemed the most probable of the three suggested causes.

Pierre, however, showed no ill-will to the Irishman, but merely returned his glances with a supercilious look, as though he considered him his inferior.

But he could not long remain silent; and so, after

riding on briskly for a short distance, he turned to Teddy, and with a mischievous twinkle in his small, black eye, said, with much suavity :

“Parlez vous Français?”

“Spake it in English, ye spalpeen ! and thin a gintleman can answer yees !” replied Teddy, reddening with vexation. “If it’s frog language ye’s jabbering, sure it’s not mesilf as wants to know what ye says, now.”

“Que voulez-vous, Monsieur ?” inquired the Frenchman, looking slyly at me, with a significant shrug, and secretly enjoying the discomfiture of Teddy.

“Quack, quack, quack, kither hoben !” rejoined Teddy, fiercely. “Sure, now, and is it that ye can understand yoursilf, ye thafe? It’s maybe smart, now, ye’s afther thinking yoursilf, by token ye can say things I don’t know the maaning of. And so ye is smart, barring the foolish part, which comprehinds the whole of yees. Troth ! can ye fight, Misther Frog-ater? Come, now, that’s English ; and, by St. Pathrick’s bones, I’ll wager ye’re too much of a coward to know the maaning on’t !”

“Come, come, Teddy,” I said, “you are getting personal. I can allow no quarreling.”

“Och ! there’s no danger, your honor !” returned Teddy, turning upon Pierre a withering look of contempt. “It’s not iny frog-ater as is going to fight his bethers, and sure it’s not Teddy O’Lagherty as can fight alone, jist.”

Meantime there had been a quiet, half smile resting on the features of the Frenchman, as though he was secretly enjoying a fine joke. Even the abusive language of the excited Irishman did not appear to disturb his equanimity in the least. There he sat, as cool and apparently as indifferent as if nothing derogatory to his fighting propensities had been uttered, or at least understood by him.

I was beginning in fact to think the latter was the case, or else that Teddy was more than half right in calling him a coward, when I became struck with a peculiar expression, which suddenly swept over his bronzed features, and was superseded by the same quiet smile—as we sometimes at noon-day see a cloud flit over a bright landscape, shading it for an instant only.

Suddenly Pierre reined his pony close alongside of Teddy, and, in a very bland voice, as if begging a favor, said :

"Monsieur, you say someting 'bout fight, eh? Sare, I sall 'ave le plus grande delight to soot you with un—vot you call him—peestole, eh?"

"The divil ye will, now?" replied Teddy, with a comical look of surprise. "Sure, thin, an' it's mesilf that ud like to be doing the same to yoursilf, and ye was worth the powther it ud cost."

"Sare," returned the Frenchman, with dignity, "in my coontree, ven gentilshommes go for kill, dey nevare count ze cost. I soot you—I cut you troat—I sharge you notings."

"Well, be jabers! since ye've got your foul tongue into English, and be blamed to yees, I'll do the same for your dirthy silf!" retorted Teddy; "for it's not Teddy O'Lagherty as 'll be behind aven a nager in liberalithies of that sort, now."

"You are both too liberal of your valor by half," I rejoined, laughing at what I thought would merely end in words.

But I was soon convinced of my error; for scarcely had the expression left my lips, when the Frenchman sprung from his pony, and, striking his hand on his pistols, exclaimed :

"Je l'attaquerai : I will 'ave at you, Monsieur, ven you do me von leetle honoor, sare!"

"It's not long you'll have to wait thin!" cried Teddy; and before I could interfere—or in fact was fully aware of what was taking place—he had dismounted and drawn a pistol. "Tin paces, ye blaggard!" he cried; "and may the saints be marciful to yees!"

"Hold!" I shouted. "Rash men, what are you about? I forbid—"

Here I was interrupted by the reports of two pistols, followed by a stifled cry of pain from Pierre, who instantly dropped his weapon and placed his hand to his shoulder.

The next moment I was on my feet, and rushing to his assistance, accompanied by Teddy, whose features,

instead of anger, now exhibited a look of commiseration.

"Are you hurt, Pierre?" I inquired, as I gained his side.

"Ver leetle scratch," replied the Frenchman, taking away his hand covered with blood.

I instantly tore away his garments, and ascertained that the ball of Teddy had passed quite through the fleshy part of his arm near the shoulder, but without breaking a bone or severing an artery.

"A lucky escape, Pierre!" I said.

He merely shrugged his shoulders, and coolly proceeded to take snuff, with an indifference that surprised me.

When he had done, he turned to Teddy, with :

"Vill you 'ave von more—vot you call him—le plus grand satisfactoine, eh?"

"Sure, and it's mesilf as is not over-parthicular, iny ways. If ye's satisfied, I'm contint—or conthrariwise, as plases ye most."

"Vell, den, suppose we shake hand, eh?" rejoined Pierre. "I soot you—you soot me: ve 'ave both satisfactoine, eh?" and the next moment these two singular beings were pleasantly engaged in complimenting each other on his bravery.

Oh, curious human nature! From that moment Pierre Boreaux and Teddy O'Lagherty were sworn friends for life—nor did I ever hear an angry word pass between them afterward.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A GOOD JOKE AND A DISMAL NIGHT.



URSUING our course along the banks of the Walla-Walla, we passed Dr. Whitman's Station, and camped the following night in a romantic dell at the foot of a ridge adjoining the Grand Round.

In the course of the evening we were visited by several Indians, with whom we held a small traffic for provisions. For fear of evil consequences, we kept well on our guard, but they displayed no hostile intentions.

Pierre complained somewhat of his arm, which I had bandaged at the time as well as circumstances would permit. I advised him to consult the Indians, who are known to be great proficient in the healing art. He did so, and the result proved highly beneficial; so much so that he was able to use it sooner than I expected.

The next day we crossed the Grand Round (a delightful valley of twenty miles in extent, watered by a pleasant stream), also the Blue Mountains, and descended into the valley of the Snake River.

The scenes we passed over were, many of them, wild, and some of them romantic in the extreme; but as more important matters press upon me, I cannot pause to describe them.

The Indians we now beheld on every side of us—but they offered no violence.

The third day from crossing the Grand Round, we reached Fort Bois, where we passed the night.

The next morning we pursued our journey; having learned, meantime, that Black George, for whom I made particular inquiries, had passed here a few days before, in company with two other trappers, on their way to Fort Hall.

This was cheering news to me; and we pushed for-

ward, as fast as circumstances would permit, in the hope of overtaking him.

About noon of the third day from leaving Fort Bois, we came upon some half a dozen fine-looking springs, when Teddy declared he must quench his thirst.

As he descended from his horse, the Frenchman shrugged his shoulders and gave me a very significant wink.

"What do you mean, Pierre?" I inquired, fully at a loss to comprehend what seemed to him a capital joke.

"Paix ! le diable !" he exclaimed, laying his hand on my arm and pointing to Teddy, who, having reached a spring, was just in the act of bending down to the water. "Monsieur sall see."

"See?" I repeated.

"Oui, Monsieur."

"What shall I see?"

"Och ! howly Moses ! be St. Pathrick ! jabers !" cried Teddy at this moment, springing to his feet and running toward us with all his fleetness, holding his tongue with one hand and pressing the other upon his forehead. "Och ! murther ! I'm dead intirely—bit—ate up—claan killed, I is !"

"What is the matter?" I inquired, unable to comprehend the meaning of such strange actions, while Pierre leaned forward on his saddle and held both hands upon his sides, fairly screaming with laughter.

"Mather, is't?" rejoined Teddy. "Musha ! but it's mather intirely. Me tongue's burnt out of me, jist, baring about sax inches on't."

"Burned, Teddy?"

"Ay, burnt, your honor—that's the wor-r-d now. Sure, that's the divil's pool, and so it is, and it's himsilf must be hereabouts. Och ! but I'm in a hurry to lave the spot betimes ;" and springing into his saddle he rode away, in spite of my calls to the contrary, as fast as his beast could carry him.

"What is it, Pierre?" I exclaimed ; but Pierre was too much convulsed to answer me ; and, dismounting, I approached the miraculous water myself.

Now I understood the joke ; and, to do myself jus-

tice, I must say I so far imitated the Frenchman that I was unable to quit the spot for at least ten minutes.

In his eager desire for a cool, refreshing draught, Teddy had plunged his face down into and gulped in a mouthful of boiling water, from what are known as the Hot Springs.

Of these springs there are some five or six, the water of which bubbles up clear and sparkling, and, all meeting, form a small stream, which rolls away with a pleasing murmur.

No wonder Teddy, not understanding the phenomenon, and being superstitious too, should imagine Old Nick had something to do with it.

"Vell, you see, eh?" exclaimed Pierre, as I remounted. "By gar! him von ver moche good joke! He tink he von diable, eh?" and he ended with another hearty laugh, in which I was forced to join.

About three miles further on we overtook Teddy, whose running ardor had cooled down to a quiet walk.

"Ah, faith," said he, dolefully, "it's mighty feared I's beginning to git that ye'd not come at all, at all."

"Why so, Teddy?"

"Oh, worra! worra! that I should iver live to taste the divil's pool! And did ye sae him, body and bones, your honor?—and how did he look, if it's all the same to yees, and he no forbid your tilling rasonably?"

"Why, Teddy, there was nothing to be alarmed at;" and I proceeded to explain the mystery. "It is a very natural phenomenon, I assure you."

"Nath'ral, is it? Och! thin I have it, 'pon me sowl!"

"Have what?"

"Why, sure, your honor, I sae claan through it."

"Well, what do you see, Teddy?"

"Musha! but it's the divil's tae-pot."

"Tea-pot?"

"Ah! troth and it is. Ould Sathan is at the bothom of it, do yees mind! He haats the wather there, now, to coax saints to dhrink tae wid him, the spalpeen! and thin he'll make the most of 'em, d'ye sae, your honor! Och! it's a lucky man Teddy O'Lagherty is for gitting off so

asy, barring he's more unlucky by token he wint to the place at all, at all."

It had become a fixed fact with Teddy, which all my jests and arguments failed to alter, that the Hot Springs and his Satanic Majesty were indissolubly connected.

But this did not lessen the joke, which for a long time afterward served Pierre and myself as a specific for blue devils and *ennui*.

As I said before, we were traveling through a country thickly peopled with savages. What we had seen of these appeared to be friendly; but knowing the treacherous nature of many, we felt that self-preservation demanded we should at all times be on our guard.

For this purpose our arms were always ready to our hands in the day-time, and at night each took his turn of standing sentinel.

Thus far we had escaped every difficulty; but Pierre often warned us not to be too sanguine of reaching Fort Hall without a brush of some kind, as he well knew the nature of those surrounding us.

The sun was just sinking behind the Blue Mountains, when we came to a small stream, a tributary of Snake River, that took its devious course through a valley between two precipitous ridges, and thence through a cañon of a thousand feet in depth.

The valley was shaded by large trees of various kinds, and was romantic in its appearance. It contained good grazing also, and good water, and this made it a desirable camp-ground.

Hoppling our horses and setting them free, we kindled a fire, around which we squatted to cook our meat, smoke our pipes, and fill up the intervals with the most amusing subjects, among which Teddy and his "divil's tae-pot" came in for their full quota of mirthful comment.

At length we began to grow drowsy; and having seen our animals tethered within the circle of the fire, and it being Pierre's turn to stand guard, Teddy and I threw ourselves upon the ground, our blankets rolled around us, and soon were fast asleep.

For an hour or two everything passed off quietly, when Pierre awoke me with a gentle shake.

"Ver sorre, Monsieur, to—vot you call him—deesturb you, eh?—but ze tam Injen—sacre le diable!"

"Well," said I, starting up, "what is it? Are we attacked?" and at the same time I awoke Teddy.

"By gar," returned the Frenchman, "I see von leetle—vot you call him—sneaker, eh? Him creep—creep—creep—and I tink I wake you, sare, and soot him dead!"

"Faith, that's it?" cried Teddy, grasping his rifle and springing to his feet: "that's it, now! Shoot the haythen!"

By this time I was fully aroused to the sense of danger; and quickly learning from Pierre where he had seen the savage, I grasped my rifle and sprung beyond the fire-light, in an opposite direction, followed by my companions.

We had not gained ten paces, when crack, crack, went some five or six muskets, the balls of which, whizzing over our heads, did not tend to lessen our speed.

We reached the covert unharmed, however, and for the time considered ourselves safe.

When we turned to reconnoiter, not a sign of a living thing could we see save our horses, which stood with ears erect, trembling and snorting, as if conscious of a hidden foe.

For an hour we remained in this manner; when, concluding the enemy had departed, I proposed returning to the fire.

"Hist!" whispered Pierre, grasping my arm. "You sall see, Monsieur."

And he was right; for, not ten minutes afterward, he silently directed my attention to some dark objects lying flat upon the ground, which, with all my experience and penetration, I could not believe were savages, until I perceived them gradually nearing our horses. Then I became alarmed, lest, reaching them, they might speedily mount and escape, leaving us to make the best of a perilous and toilsome journey on foot.

"What is to be done, Pierre? I fear we are in a bad fix."

"Je me couche—je tire fur lui ; I lie down sare—I soot at him. You sall see. Stay von leetle minneet. Ven you hears my canon, den you soot and run at him as le diable."

Saying this, Pierre glided away as noiselessly as an Indian, and I saw nothing more of him for several minutes.

Meanwhile Teddy and I kept our eyes intently fixed upon our stealthy foes, and our rifles in rest, ready to give them their deadly contents at a moment's warning.

Slowly, like a cat creeping upon her game, did these half-naked Indians, serpent-like, steal toward our animals, every moment lessening the distance between them and the objects of their desires.

I began to grow nervous. What had become of Pierre? If he intended to do anything, now I thought was the time ; a few moments more, and it would be too late ; and, acting upon this thought, I drew a bead upon the most advanced savage, and was about pulling the trigger, when the latter suddenly bounded to his feet, uttered a yell of delight, and sprung toward the now frightened animals, imitated in his manœuvre by some ten or twelve others.

"Good Heaven ! all is lost !" I exclaimed, bitterly.

The words had scarcely passed my lips, when bang went a pistol from among the horses ; and the foremost savage—the one I had singled out, and who was on the point of grasping one of the tether ropes—bounded into the air, with a horrible yell, and fell back a corpse.

This was wholly unlooked for by his companions, and checked for an instant those pressing on behind.

Remembering Pierre's request, I whispered to Teddy to "throw" his man and charge.

Both our rifles spoke together, and down tumbled two more.

At the same moment Pierre's rifle sent another to his account ; and, simultaneously springing forward, all three of us made the welkin ring with our shouts of joy and defiance.

This settled the matter to our triumph. The Indians became alarmed and bewildered. They had counted on certain success in stealing our horses without the loss of a man. Four had fallen in twice as many seconds ; and fancying themselves in an ambuscade, they turned, with wild yells of affright, and disappeared in every direction ; so that by the time I had joined Pierre, we were masters of the field, and not an unwounded foe in sight.

"You see hoss safe, Monsieur," said Pierre, hurriedly, as we met ; "and I see to ze Injen, eh?" and without waiting for a reply, he darted forward, and the next moment was engaged in tearing off the bloody scalps of the slain.

As every mountaineer considers this his prerogative, I did not interfere ; but ordering Teddy to assist me, we cut the lariats and led our horses back into the darkness, for fear of another attack, in which we might come out second best.

In a few minutes Pierre approached me leisurely, and laughingly said :

"Tout va bien : All pe vell, sare ;" and he held up to the light four bloody scalps. "Von, two, tree, not pe dead, I kill him. Good for—vot you call him—stealer, eh?—ha, ha, ha !" and taking out his box, he deliberately proceeded to take snuff with his bloody fingers ; adding, by way of accompaniment : "Von good ver moche exsallant joke, him—ha, ha, ha ! Sacre ! me tink him get von leetle—vot you call him—astonishment, eh ? By gar ! ver moche good."

As we did not consider it prudent to venture again within the fire-light, we decided to remain where we were through the night, and guard against a surprise.

All was dark around us, except in the direction of the roaring fire, which, flickering to the passing breeze, made the scene of our late encampment look dismal enough.

To add to its gloom and cheerlessness, we were presently greeted with the distant howl of a hungry pack of wolves. Every moment these howls grew louder, showing the animals were approaching the spot, while our

horses snorted and became so restive we could scarcely hold them.

Nearer and nearer came the hungry beasts of prey, till at length we could perceive their fiery eyeballs, and occasionally catch a glimpse of their bodies, as they hovered around the circle of the fire, fearing to approach the carcasses they so much coveted.

For an hour or two they prowled and howled around us, "making night hideous with their orgies," while the fire gradually grew less and less bright, the gloom deepened, and their boldness increased accordingly.

At last one, unable longer to bear the keen pangs of hunger, leaped forward and buried his teeth and claws in the carcass of one of our late foes; the others followed his example; and in less than a minute as many as fifty of these ravenous animals were growling, fighting, gnashing their teeth, and tearing the flesh from the bones of the dead Indians.

Pierre now informed me we were in imminent danger of being attacked ourselves—as, having once tasted blood, and their appetites being rather sharpened than appeased, they would only become more bold in consequence.

To my inquiry as to what should be done, he replied that we must continue to kill one of their number as fast as he might be devoured by his companions; and, setting the example, he shot one forthwith.

Sure enough! no sooner had the beast fallen, than the rest sprung upon and devoured him.

My rifle being loaded, I knocked over another, which met the same fate!

In this manner we kept firing alternately for a couple of hours, during which time the old stock was replenished by new-comers, and I began to fancy that all of the genus would be present before daylight.

But at last one after another got satisfied, and slunk away, licking his chaps. No new ones appeared; and, ere the stars grew dim, nothing was visible of the last night's butchery but a collection of clean-licked, shiny bones.

While the fire lasted, we could see to take sight; but

after that went out, we fired at random ; though, knowing the exact location of the beasts, our shots generally proved successful in killing or wounding.

When morning again put a smiling face upon the recent sable earth, we mounted our horses and left the loathsome spot, thanking God for our providential deliverance.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE OLD TRAPPER AGAIN.



T was a warm, pleasant afternoon in June that we came in sight of Fort Hall, which we hailed with three cheers of delight ; and, setting spurs to our horses, in less than half an hour we rode gayly through the gates.

As we entered the area, which, though much smaller, was fashioned like Fort Laramie, I perceived a small group of mountaineers or trappers, among whom were two or three Indians, all apparently engaged in some important traffic. The next moment I heard a well-known voice exclaim :

"It's done gone then, or I'm no snakes ; and heyar's what never backs for nobody and nothin' !"

The next moment the speaker sauntered toward me, just as I had dismounted from my horse.

As he approached, he looked me steadily in the face for a moment ; and then, springing forward, with hand extended and flashing eyes, he fairly shouted :

"Bosson ! for a thousand wild cats ! I'll be dog-gone ef it ain't !" and, ere the sentence was concluded, my hand was suffering under the powerful but welcome pressure of that of Black George. "Wall," he added, "I'll be teetotal rumflumuxed, ef I don't think you're a trump, and a ace at that ! Whar d'ye come from now ?

and which way's you goin'? ef it's not tallied on a private stick."

"I came direct from Oregon City," I answered, by no means backward in displaying my delight at meeting him again.

"Whar's the garls?"

"Left them all behind me."

"Augh! S'pect you left your heart thar too, eh?"

"Possibly."

"I'd sw'ar it. Wall, hoss, I don't blame ye. Them's about as nice human picters as ever this critter seed. Ef I'd a ben thirty year younger, I mought hev got into deep water thar myself and lost the whole kit. Howsomever, this coon never tried treein' a garl but once't—and Suke Harris soon blowed damp weather on to my powder, and it warn't no shoot, nohow—augh! Wall, wall," he added, with something like a sigh, "them's by-gones anyhow, and s'pect it's all for the best; 'case I'm an old dog, and lead a wanderin' life; and when I kind o' git rubbed out—why, ye see, I hain't got no pups nor nothin' to be a barkin' over my last roost."

Here Black George coughed a little, and turned aside his head, when his eyes chanced upon Teddy and Pierre, who, having dismounted at another part of the inclosure, were now approaching to join me.

"Why, hello, hoss! how goes it?" continued the old trapper, addressing the Irishman and extending his hand. "And here's Pierre, too, lookin' as nateral as a young cub; and I'll be dog-gone ef that same old smell-box ain't jest whar it used to was, a reg'lar fortress, makin' his fingers runners 'twixt it and his nose. Augh! gin us a chaw'r and see the ginteel done."

"Faith, ye're the same ould chap!" rejoined Teddy, grasping one hand, while the Frenchman took the other. "Sure and it's good for sore eyes to sae the likes o' yees ag'in!"

"Ah, Monsieur Blake Shorge," added Pierre, "it give me von ver moche le plus grande delight, for—vot you call him—discoverment you, eh? Ver exceeding moche glad, by gar!"

As soon as the congratulations were over on all sides, Black George turned to me with :

"Well, Bosson, hearn anything o' your pardner?"

"Nothing ; and I am now on my way to hunt him out, if among the living."

"A long tramp, and no beaver, or I'm no sinner!"

"You think it impossible for me to find him, then?"

"Wall, hoss, it's hard sayin' what's unpossible ; but I'd jest as soon think o' huntin' for a singed tail beaver, I would, and odds on my side to that."

Here I entered into an explanation of how he was lost, and wound up by asking :

"And now do you not think it possible he was taken prisoner?"

"Nothin' agin it, as I knows on."

"And if taken prisoner by the Mexicans, is it not possible—nay, more, is it not probable—he was sold into slavery?"

"Why," replied Black George, who seemed struck with this last suggestion, "I'll gin in it sort o' edges that way, that's a fact—I'll be dog-gone ef it don't! But s'pose it's all so—how's you to diskiver him?—'case it looks a heap mixed to this child, to see it in the cl'arest light."

"That is just what I wish to know myself, and for that purpose I have started on the search—being the least, to my mind, I could do under the circumstances."

"Then you're bound sothe, I s'pose?"

"Exactly ; and I want you to join me, with three as good men as you can select."

"Ah, yes ; but ye see it's beaver time now, and—"

"I understand ; but I am willing to pay you as much as you could make in your regular vocation."

"You is, hey? Wall, come, now, that's a sensible and feelin' speech, and you couldn't hev bettered the gist on't ef you'd a splattered it over with all the big words you knows. I like a straight for'ard-toe-the-mark way o' dealin'—I'll be dogged ef I don't!—and bein's I know you're a gentleman—why, I'll jest tell ye I'm in, ef it takes all my ha'r to put her through. Besides, thar's a chance to raise ha'r, and that's a sport as this coon al'ays had a nateral

incline for. I've jest got in from the Blues, and made a sale of some hides—so I'm ready to travel and fight jest when you says the word. Got any bacca?"

"Can you raise me three more of the same sort?"

"I reckon."

"Do so; and we will start, if possible, to-morrow morning."

"Wall, that'll jest save me a big spree—augh! I say, boys," he continued, drawing from the pocket of his hunting-shirt a small canteen, "got the critter here—and so s'pose we take an inside wet, eh? S'pect 'twon't hurt your feelings none;" and he set an example which was very accurately followed.

"By the by, George," said I, "have you seen or heard anything of Prairie Flower, since that night when she appeared, gave the alarm, and disappeared so mysteriously?"

"Jest what I's a-goin' to ax you. No, I hain't never sot eyes on her purty face sence; but I hearn a trapper, as come from the sothe, say as he had seed her down to Taos way, and all her Injins was along. She was axin' him, now I come to remember, ef he'd hearn o' a prisoner bein' took that-a-ways and sold to the mines."

"Ha! yes! well? what did he reply?" exclaimed I, as a sudden thought struck me.

"That he'd hearn o' several—but none in partikelar."

"Heaven bless her! I understand it all!"

"All what?" inquired Black George.

"Why, when I saw Prairie Flower last, I informed her of the fate of Charles Huntly; and ten to one she has set off to search for him!"

"That's it, for my old muley!" cried Black George, not a little excited. "I've said afore she was a angel, and heyar's a possum that don't speak without knowin'! Lord bless her! I could love her like darnation, jest for that! Ef she ain't one on 'em, why was peraries made, hey?"

A few minutes more were spent in like conversation, when Black George parted from me to engage some companions for our journey.

Bidding Teddy look to our horses, I entered the com-

mon reception-room of the fort, greatly elated at the intelligence just received.

Sweet Prairie Flower ! She was doubtless at that very moment engaged in an undertaking which should have been performed by me long before, and I could not but condemn myself for what seemed either a great oversight or gross neglect of duty.

And should Heaven favor her, and she discover my friend and set him free, what a debt of gratitude would he owe her for saving him twice ? first from death, and secondly from a slavery worse than death.

And should this happen, what would be the result to two beings, who, whatever might be outward seemings, loved each other purely and passionately !

Sweet, mysterious Prairie Flower ! I could hardly realize she was only mortal ; for there was something in her every look, thought and deed, which seemed to lift her above the human race.

In the course of an hour Black George rejoined me, bringing with him three large-boned, robust, good-looking fellows, who, he informed me, were ready to follow me at a fair remuneration. In a few minutes everything was settled, when each departed to make preparations for an early start on the morrow.

A storm, however, set in during the night, which raged with such violence the next morning that I was compelled to defer my departure for twenty-four hours longer.

To me the day wore tediously away ; for my mind was continually harping on my lost friend and Prairie Flower ; and now that I had gained some intelligence of the latter, I could not avoid connecting the two in a way to raise my hopes in a great degree, and render me doubly anxious to be on the way.

But if the delay proved tedious to me, not so did it to my companions, who had a merry time of it over their cups and cards ; and they drank and played till it became a serious matter for them to distinguish an ace of trumps from a gill of whisky.

However, the day went at last, as all days will, and I

was gratified the second morning with a glance at the sun as it rose bright and glorious in the east.

I hastened to rouse my companions, who were rather the worse for the previous day's indulgence, and in a short time we were all mounted and in motion, a goodly company of seven.

Shaping our course southward, a couple of hours brought us to Port Neuf River, which we found very turbulent from the late storm, and in consequence very difficult to cross.

After examining the banks for some distance, and finding no good ford, we determined on swimming it.

This was no easy undertaking; for the current ran very swiftly, and loudly roared, as its flashing but muddy waters dashed furiously against the rocks, which here and there reared their ugly heads, as if with a half-formed intention of damming and forcing it into another channel.

"Monsieur," said Pierre to me, as we stood hesitating what to do, "you see ze odder bank, eh?"

I nodded assent.

"Sacre! now I tell you I sall 'ave von grande satisfactione of put my foot dere—or I sall be von—by gar! vot you call him—dead, wet homme, eh?"

As he spoke, he spurred his horse forward, and the next moment the fiery animal was nobly contending with an element, which, in spite of his struggles, rapidly bore him down on its bosom; while his rider, as if to show his utter contempt for danger, sat erect on his back, coolly engaged in taking snuff.

"Thunder!" exclaimed Black George, with a grin; "ef thar ain't that old smell-box ag'in! Ef ever he goes under, he'll do it with a sneeze. Augh!"

"Sure and it's throublesome he finds the wather now, I'm thinking," observed Teddy.

"Good heavens! he is indeed in difficulty!" I exclaimed. "Quick! let us ride down the bank and be prepared to give him aid!"

And in fact our aid came none too soon; for the stream had borne both rider and horse down to a narrow channel, where the water rushed furiously over the rocks, and, being partially obstructed below, formed an eddy or

whirlpool of a very dangerous character, in which the beast was floundering and vainly striving to reach either bank.

By this time Pierre had become aware of his danger, and was exerting his utmost skill to keep his seat and guide his animal safely out of the fearful vortex.

Just below him was a short, narrow reach, of considerable depth, with a slight fall at its further termination, where the water seethed and foamed with great violence; after which it became comparatively tranquil, as it spread out on a broad level, to again concentrate its greatest force at a point still below.

As we reached the bank alongside of the guide, we all dismounted; when Black George, leaping upon a steep rock which overhung the stream, instantly threw him a rope that he had selected for the purpose.

Pierre caught one end of it eagerly, and, fearing to remain longer where he was, instantly abandoned his horse and plunged into the water.

The next minute we had drawn him ashore, though not entirely scatheless, as the whirling current had several times thumped him against the rocks, and bruised his limbs and body in several places.

Pierre, however, seemed to care more for his horse than himself; and no sooner had he found a safe footing on *terra firma*, than, giving himself a shake, he cried: "Mine hoss, by gar!" and darted away to the rescue of the unfortunate brute, which was now being hurried against his will through the cañon.

We all followed Pierre down the stream; but ere we gained the tranquil part of the river, before spoken of, the animal had passed safely over the falls, and, with a joyful whinny, was now fast swimming to the shore, where he was soon caught by his owner, who expressed his joy in sundry shouts and singular antics.

"Ah! sacre!" cried the Frenchman, as he remounted his gallant pony, shaking his hand with an air of defiance at the heedless river: "I sall 'ave von le plus satisfactione again try your tam trowning;" and no sooner said, than he spurred into the liquid element, and succeeded, after

some difficulty, in gaining the opposite shore; an example we all safely imitated.

We now struck one of the most northern points of the Bear River Mountains; and for the rest of the day we pursued our course without accident, over steep ridges, through dangerous defiles, dense thickets, deep gorges and ravines, passing yawning chasms, and all the concomitants of wild mountain scenery.

Sometimes we stood on a point which commanded an extensive view of a country of great beauty and grandeur—where the soul could expand and revel amid the unchanged fastnesses of a thousand years—and anon we were completely hidden from the sight of anything but the interwoven shrubbery, through which we diligently labored our way.

At last we came to a fine spring, around which grew a limited circle of excellent grass, presenting the appearance of a spot, which, at some remote period, had been cultivated.

Here we encamped, built a fire, ate our suppers, and slept to the music of howling wolves.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TRAPPING AND A STAMPEDE.



It is unnecessary to weary the reader with further details of mountain life. Unless in cases of extreme peril, from savages or wild beasts, the scenes are monotonous; and enough I think has been recorded to give a correct idea of life as it is, with all its dangers and hardships, beyond the boundaries of civilization. I may therefore be permitted to press forward and annihilate time and space, only pausing occasionally to give something

new, or something out of the regular routine of every day venture.

It was my intention, on leaving Fort Hall, to make the best of my way toward Taos, a small Mexican village, much frequented by mountaineers, situated on the western side of an arm of the Green Mountains, some fifty or sixty miles north of Santa Fé, and on a small tributary of the Rio Grande.

This was to be my first destination, and where I was in hopes of gaining some intelligence of my friend, from the many adventurers there collected, the traveling representatives of all the territories as well as Mexico.

It was possible, too, I might fall in with Prairie Flower and her tribe, from whom I had sanguine expectations of gaining some information, either good or bad. If Prairie Flower had, as I inferred from what Black George imparted, actually been in search of Charles Huntly, I could at once gain the result and extent of her operations and shape my own accordingly. With this view of the matter, as may readily be supposed, I felt no little anxiety to see her, and on no route to my thinking would I be more likely to find her than on the one I had chosen and was now pursuing.

Making the best of our way over the hills, we struck the Bear River on the third day from leaving Fort Hall.

This river, which takes its rise in the very heart of the mountain range to which it gives a name, presents the curious phenomenon of a stream running adverse ways, and nearly parallel to itself, for a distance of from one to two hundred miles. Beginning, as just stated, in the very center of the Bear River Mountains, it flows away northward on its devious course for a hundred and fifty or two hundred miles, and then, encircling a high ridge with the bend of an ox bow, runs southward nearly the same distance, enlarging with numerous tributaries, and emptying at last into the Great Salt Lake within fifty or seventy-five miles of its own head waters.

Formerly this stream was much resorted to by trappers, who here found beaver very numerous and mountain game in abundance. Beaver dams, in process of

decay, may here and there be seen at the present day—and, at rare intervals, a thriving settlement of the little fellows themselves—but, as Black George remarked, with a sigh of regret :

“It ain’t what it used to was, no how.”

Soon after we had camped, Black George, who ever had an eye to business, started out in search of game, and soon returned with the intelligence that “beaver sign was about,” and forthwith proceeded to get his traps, which he had brought along in his possibles.

“What are you going to do?” I inquired.

“Make ’em come, hoss—nothin’ short.”

As I had never witnessed the *modus operandi* of catching beaver, I expressed a desire to do so, which was responded to with :

“Come on, Bosson, and I’ll put ye through—I’ll be dog-gone ef I don’t !”

Taking our way to the river, which was here rather shallow, Black George led me down some two hundred yards, and then directed my attention to some small tracks made in the muddy bottom of the stream along the margin of the water.

“Them’s the sign, d’ye see ! and thar’s fur about, sartin, or this possum don’t know shucks.”

Saying this, the old mountaineer proceeded to set his traps, of which he had some five or six. Moistening a small stick in his “medicine,” as he termed it—an oily substance obtained from a gland of the beaver—he fastened it to the trap, and then placed the latter in the “run” of the animal, just under the edge of the water, securing it to a sapling on the bank by a small cord. Another cord led off from the trap several feet, and was attached to a “floating stick”—so called from its floating on the water—by which appendage the trapper, in case the beaver gets away with his property, is enabled to recover it.

“And now,” said I, when he had done, “what inducement has the animal to become your victim ?”

“Why he gits to be my meat, you mean ?”

“Exactly.”

“Wall, I’ll jest explanify—though mayhap I’ll not git

it out as scientiferic as some folks—for, as I said some time ago, edication never come in this child's line. Ye see, it's jest this: beaver's like I've hearn say women-folks was. He's got an orful cur'osity, and it gits him into bad snaps without his intendin' it. Ye see, he'll come along here arter a while, and he'll smell that thar 'medicine,' and think mayhap thar's another beaver about—leastways he'll want to know purty bad—and so he'll come smellin' round, and, afore he knows it, his foot gits into the trap and thar he is. Augh!"

Having delivered himself of this, Black George quietly continued his operations, till all his traps were set, and then together we returned to our camp.

On arriving there I found that the beaver mania had taken possession of Black George's companions, who were in consequence absent with like sinister designs against the harmless little fellows.

On returning with the old mountaineer in the morning, I soon discovered he had "made a raise," as he expressed it, "of three old uns and a kitten." The other trappers were somewhat successful also; so that on that fatal night no less than a dozen beavers lost their "run" forever.

Before raising camp, my mountain friends proceeded to skin the animals, scrape the inside of the pelts of fat and all superfluous matter, and then stretch them on hoops for drying—after which they were ready for packing. This latter is done by turning the fur inside, putting several together and fastening them with cords, when they are tightly pressed into the possibles of the trapper, and thus conveyed on mules to the rendezvous-market, which is sometimes in one place and sometimes in another.

The labor of the trapper is very severe, and his perils without number. Sometimes he traps on his own account—alone, or with two or three associates—and sometimes for a company. In the first instance he is known as the "free trapper"—in the second as the "hired hand."

In either case, however, his hardships are the same. He sets off to the mountains as soon as the spring rains are over, and there generally remains till the approach-

ing storms of autumn drive him to winter quarters, where his time is spent in all kinds of dissipation to which he is accessible. If he makes a fortune in the summer, he spends it in the winter, and returns to his vocation in the spring as poor as when he started the year previous ; and not unfrequently worse off ; for, if a "free trapper," ten to one but he sacrifices his animals in some drunken, gambling spree, and is forced to go out on credit, or as a "hired hand." He braves all kinds of weather in his business, and all kinds of danger, from the common accidents of the mountains, to his conflicts with wild beasts and wilder and more ferocious savages. But he is a philosopher, and does not mind trifles. So he escapes with whole bones, or even with life, he looks upon his hardships, encounters and mishaps, only as so much literary stock, to be retailed out to his companions over a warm fire, a euchre deck, and a canteen of whisky.

Seeking the best beaver regions, he scans carefully all the rivers, creeks and rivulets in the vicinity for "beaver sign," regardless of danger. If he finds a tree across a stream, he gives it close attention, to ascertain whether it is there by accident, by human design, or whether it is "thrown" by the animal of his search for the purpose of damming the water. If the first or second, he passes on ; if the last, he begins his search for the "run of the critter." He carefully scrutinizes all the banks, and peers under them for "beaver tracks." If he finds any, his next examination is to ascertain whether they are "old" or "fresh." If the latter, then his traps are set forthwith, in the manner already shown.

In his daily routine of business he not unfrequently encounters terrible storms of rain or snow—the former sufficient to deluge him and raise rivulets to rivers—and the latter to bury him, without almost superhuman exertions, far from mortal eye, and there hold him to perish,

"Unwept, unhonored and unsung."

These are the least of his dangers. He is often attacked by wild beasts, when nothing but his presence of mind, his coolness and good marksmanship, can extri-

cate him from his difficulty; and yet he rarely fails to come off conqueror. Escaping these, he must be continually on his guard against his worst foe, the wily Indian; so that he can never approach a bush with the surety that a treacherous ball may not put a close to his mortal career, and all his hard earnings pass into the hands of an enemy he ever hates with the bitterness of concentrated passion. With all these dangers, hardships and vicissitudes, your genuine trapper loves his calling, would not be content to follow any other, and is in general a rough, jolly, dare-devil sort of a fellow, who not unfrequently attains to the appointed age of man, and at last "goes under," with all the stoicism of a martyr,

"With not a stone, and not a line,
To tell he e'er had been."

Continuing our course, but in a more easterly direction, we at length quitted the mountains and descended to a large, beautiful, rolling prairie, with little or no vegetation but short, buffalo grass.

Taking our way over this, we had been about half a day out, and were beginning to lose sight of the lower ranges of hills, when we heard a deep rumbling, like heavy thunder, or a distant earthquake, and our guide came to a sudden halt, exclaiming:

"Le diable!"

"Howly jabers! what is it, now?" cried Teddy.

"Hist!" exclaimed Black George. "I'll be dog-gone ef I don' think we're chawrd up this time, sure as sin!"

"What is it?" I echoed.

"Von grande stampede, by gar!" answered Pierre.

"Stampede of what, I pray?"

"Buffler," replied Black George.

"Where are they?"

"Yonder they is now—here a-ways they soon will be;" and as he spoke, he pointed over the plain with his finger.

Following the direction with my eyes, I beheld in the distance a cloud of dust, which rolled upward like a

morning fog, through which, and in which, I could occasionally catch a glimpse of the huge animals, as they bounded forward with railroad velocity.

"What is to be done?" I cried.

"Grin and bear it!" responded the old trapper.

"But we shall be trodden to death! See! they are coming this way!"

"Can't die younger!" was the cool rejoinder.

"But can we not fly?"

"Howly Moses!" shouted Teddy, worked up to a keen pitch of excitement; "it's fly we must, sure, as if the divil was afther us, barring that our flying must be did on baasts, as have no wings, now, but long legs, jist."

"What for you run, eh?" grinned the Frenchman. "Him catche you, by gar! just so easy as you catche him, von leetle, zemp—vot you call him—mosquito, eh?"

"It's no use o' showin' them critters our backs," rejoined Black George. "Heyar's what don't turn back on nothin' that's got ha'r."

"Well," continued I, "you may do as you please; but as for myself I have no desire to stand in my tracks and die without an effort."

Saying this, I wheeled my horse, and was just in the act of putting spurs to him, when Black George suddenly dashed up alongside and caught my bridle.

"See heyar, boy—don't go to runnin'—or you'll discomflumicate yourself oudaciously—you will, by thunder! Eh, Pierre?"

"Certainment, by gar!" answered the guide; and then both burst into a hearty laugh.

"What do you mean?" cried I, in astonishment, unable to comprehend their singular actions; and I turned to the other mountaineers, who were sitting quietly on their horses, and inquired if they did not think there was danger.

"Thar's al'ays danger," replied one, "in times like this here; but thar's no safety in runnin'!"

"For Heaven's sake! what are we to do, then? Stay here quietly and get run over?"

Black George gave a quiet laugh, and the Frenchman

proceeded to take snuff. This was too much for my patience. I felt myself insulted; and jerking away my rein, from the hand of the trapper, I exclaimed, indignantly :

"I do not stay here to be the butt of any party. Teddy, follow me!"

The next moment I was dashing over the prairie at the full speed of my horse, with the Irishman, to use a nautical phrase, close in my wake, whooping and shouting.

The direction we had taken was the same as that pursued by the running buffaloes; and we could only hope for ultimate safety by reaching some huge tree, rock, or other obstacle to their progress, in advance of them.

How far we would have to run to accomplish this, there was no telling; for, as far as the eye could reach ahead of us, we saw nothing but the same monotonous, rolling plain.

The beasts, thundering on in our rear, were so numerous, and their line so broad, that an attempt to ride out of their way, by turning to the right or left, could not be thought of, as the velocity of the animals would be certain to bring a wing upon us ere we could clear their lines.

There was nothing for it, then, but a dead race; and, I will be free to own, the thought of this fairly chilled my blood. Exposed as I had been to all kinds of danger, I had never felt more alarmed and depressed in spirits than now.

What could my companions mean by their indifference and levity? Was it possible that, having given themselves up for lost, the excitement had stupefied some and turned the brains of others? Horrible thought! I shuddered, and turned on my horse to look back.

There they stood, dismounted, rifles in hand, and, just beyond them, the mighty host still booming forward. Poor fellows! all hope with them is over, I thought; and, with a sigh at their fate, I withdrew my gaze and urged on my steed.

On, on we sped, for a mile or more, when I ventured another look behind me.

Judge of my surprise, on beholding a long line of buffaloes to the right and left, rushing away in different directions; while directly before me nothing was visible but my friends, who, on perceiving me look back, made signs for me to halt and wait for them.

I did so, and in a few minutes they came up laughing.

"Why, Bosson," said Black George, waggishly, "I hope as how you've run the skeer out o' ye by this time, for I'll be dog-gone ef you can't travel a few!"

"Oui, Monsieur," added Pierre, "vous 'ave von le plus grande—vot you call him—locomotion, eh?"

"But how, in the name of all that is wonderful, did you escape?" rejoined I.

"Jest as nateral as barkin' to a pup," answered Black George. "We didn't none on us hev no fear at no time; and was only jest playin' possum, to see ef we could make your ha'r stand—never 'specting', though, you was a-goin' to put out and leave us."

"But pray tell me how you extricated yourselves?" said I, feeling rather crestfallen at my recent unheroic display.

"Why, jest as easy as shootin'—and jest that, hoss, and nothin' else."

"Explain yourself!"

"Wall, then, we kind o' waited till them critters got up, so as we could see their peepers shine, and then we all burnt powder and tumbled over two or three leaders. This skeered them as was behind, and they jest sniffed, and snorted, and sot off ayther ways like darnation. It warn't nothing wonderful, that warn't, and it 'ud been onnateral for 'em to done anything else."

"I say, your honor," rejoined Teddy, with a significant wink, "it's like, now, we've made jackasses o' ourselves, barring your honor."

"Very like," returned I, biting my lips with vexation, "all but the barring."

The truth is, I felt much as one caught in a mean act, and I would have given no small sum to have had the joke on some one else.

I detected many a quiet smile curling the lips of my companions, when they thought I did not notice them;

and I knew by this they were laughing in their sleeves, as the saying is ; but, being in my service, did not care to irritate my feelings by a more open display.

It is very galling to a sensitive person to know he has made himself ridiculous, and is a private subject of jest with his inferiors. It is no use for one under such circumstances to fret, and foam, and show temper. No ! such things only make the matter worse. The best way is to come out boldly, own to the joke, and join in the laugh. Acting upon this, I said :

“Friends, I have made a fool of myself—I am aware of it—and you are at liberty to enjoy the joke to its full extent. But remember, you must not spread it ! and when we reach a station, consider me your debtor for a ‘heavy wet’ all around.”

This proved a decided hit. All laughed freely at the time ; and that was the last I heard of it till I fulfilled my liquor pledge at Uintah Fort ; when Black George ventured the toast, “Buffler and a run,” which was followed with roars of mirth at my expense ; and there the matter ended.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CAMP STORIES AND THE ATTACK.



PASSING Uintah Fort, which awakened many painful recollections of what had occurred since my former visit here in company with my lost friend, we took a southerly course, and, crossing Green River, continued over an undulating, mountainous country, to Grand River, and thence to the most northern range of the Green Mountains, where gush forth the head waters of the Arkansas and Rio Grande.

Here we came to a beautiful valley, shut in by high hills, through which flowed a limpid stream, whose banks

wore a velvet covering of rich, green grass and innumerable wild flowers. A little back from the stream, on either side, was a delightful grove, stretching away in rows of artificial regularity.

In fact, from what I saw, and the information I gathered from my companions, I have every reason to believe this valley was at one time a nobleman's park.

I said it was shut in by hills; but there was one outlet toward the west, where the streamlet flowed gently away between two ridges.

Entering through this pass, you are struck with the singular beauty of the spot; and not more so than by a huge pile of ruins on a gentle eminence away to the right.

Here, as tradition goes, once stood a famous castle, belonging to a Spanish nobleman, who, for some state intrigue, was exiled his country, but who subsequently flourished here in great power.

He had a beautiful daughter, to whom a descendant of the Aztecs paid court; but neither the father nor the daughter fancied the suitor, and his suit was rejected.

Enraged at this, the suitor swore revenge; and possessing power and influence over a barbarous race, he succeeded, by bribes and treachery, in accomplishing his fell design.

The lord of the castle, his daughter and attendants, all fell victims; and the mighty structure, touched by the devastating fingers of Time, at last became a heap of ruins.

Such is a brief outline of the tradition, which I give for the benefit of future romancers.

As we entered this ancient retreat, the bright sun of a hot July day was just beginning to dip below the line of the western horizon; and his yellow light, streaming along the surface of the meandering waters, gave them the appearance of a long stream of molten, quivering gold.

Everything in and about the place seemed to possess the charm of enchantment. Beautiful and merry songsters, of all hues, warbled sweet tunes among the branches of the trees, or amid the tall grass and flowers

beneath them. Here and there small animals of the hare species might be seen running to and fro, while the waters of the rivulet occasionally displayed the shiny sides of a mountain trout.

Take it all in all, to me the place seemed a second Eden ; and when I turned my eyes upon the old ruins, my imagination at once carried me far back into the dark ages of the past, and the strange tales I had heard seemed literally enacting before me.

"Thar's been a heap o' blood spilt here-a-ways, take one time with another," observed Black George, as, with our pipes in our mouths, we sat around the camp-fire in the evening.

"Faith, and it's mesilf, now," said Teddy, "that ud be afther saeing the spot as hasn't been likewise, in this haythen part of Christendom "

"Oui, Monsieur Teddy," rejoined the Frenchman. "Ha ! ha ! by gar sacre ! dat pe ver nice spoke—ver nice. You sall make von moche grande—vot you call him—oratore, eh ?"

"But tell us what you know," said I, addressing the old trapper, whom I was anxious to draw out in one of his marvelous tales.

"Well, hoss, I'll gin ye the gist of a spree I once had here, ef Teddy'll agree to tell a story when I'm done."

"What say you, Teddy?"

"Och, now, it's not me mother's child as was iver blist wid the gift o' gab ; but to make the time slip off asy, I'll do me trying of it, rather thin lose that of Misther Black George, barring that I'd lose what I niver had, and that ud be lost twice, d'ye mind !"

"As how, Teddy?"

"Why, your honor, and sure wouldn't I lose the hearing the story towld, and the story itsilf besides ? and troth, wouldn't that be two ? and isn't two twice, now ?"

"Very good for you ; but come, George, go on with the tale !"

Here the old mountaineer took out his pipe, knocked out the ashes, put some of the weed into his mouth, and,

after twisting and turning himself into a comfortable position, thus began :

"Thar's none o' ye here, I s'pect, as knowed Ben Bose ; and the more's the pity ; for Ben was a screamer, he was, right out and out. He could eat more buffler meat, drink more whisky, chaw'r more 'bacca, cuss louder, and tell bigger lies, nor any white nigger this coon ever seed—and that's a dog-gone fact ! Mayhap you think as how I exaggertate ; but I ken jest prove all I've said, and more too. Why, I've seed Ben, afore now, when his meat bag war right smart empty, chaw'r up half a buffler, all wet down with about two gallon o' whisky, and then sw'ar, till all the trees round him ud git the ager, that ef he didn't git so'thin' to eat soon he'd hev to go a wolfin' with starvation. And as for lyin'—oh, he could tell sich lies, could Ben, and sw'ar to 'em so par-fict, that though you knowed all the time they was lies, you'd sort o' b'lieve 'em, and wouldn't care to do nothin' else ; for you'd kind o' say to yourself, ef they ain't facts they ort to be, and that's the same thing. Why Ben used to tell sich almighty lies, and stick to 'em so long, that he'd git to believin' 'em himself, he would—and then he'd quit 'em ; for he war never knowed to tell anything as he suspicioned bein' true ef he could help it. The only time this child ever hearn him tell a fact, was onc't in a joke, when he said he was the biggest liar on 'arth ; but he made up for that right sudden, by swearin' the next minnet he'd never told a lie in his life.

"But whar am I gittin' to ? Wall, ye see by this that Ben was one of the boys, he was, and nothin' else. Poor feller ! he went under at last like a sojer. He gin in the pint right out thar-a-ways, whar ye see the light shinin' on that big tree."

"Ah ! then he died here ?"

"Wall, he did," said the old trapper, with a sigh ; "but he died game, and that's so'thin'. It's how he went out I'm goin' to 'lighten ye ; but I'm goin' to make the story short ; for somehow these here old by-gones makes me feel watery like, and I never had much incline for water, no how. Augh !

"Ben was purty much of a gentleman, any how ; and

me and him, when we'd meet, used to come together like two pieces of wax, and stick to each other like darnation, ef not more. The last time I ever seed Ben, I got on his 'run' just back here a few mile. He was jest makin' his tracks out from Taos, and this coon war jest crossin' over from Bent's Fort. Me and him had two muleys apiece, and was both goin' out alone, and happ'd to meet jest whar two trails jine.

" 'How is ye?' sez he, 'and whar bound?'

" 'Why, I'm some,' I sez back ag'in, 'and out for a ventur'.'

" 'Jest from Bent's?'

" 'Nowhar else, hoss.'

" 'I'm from Taos. Let's splice and double the game. Augh!'

" 'So we jined in, and went talkin' 'bout this thing and that, and trying which could outlie t'other, till we got to this here valley and camped.'

" 'What d'ye think o' this place, anyhow?' sez he.

" 'I reckon it's a few,' sez I.

" 'D'ye ever see any ghosts here?' sez he.

" 'Nary a ghost, hoss!' sez I.

" 'I hev,' sez he. 'I was campin' here one night, and had jest got ready to blind my daylights, when I happ'd to cast one over thar to that old castle, and may I be sot down for a liar ef I didn't see a live ghost standin' right on that big pile, all dressed in white, and lookin' orful serious right at me. At fust I tried to think it a opterkal collusion,' sez he; 'but then I knowed right off that ef I didn't see that I didn't see nothin'; and if I didn't see nothin', what in blazes did I see? Wall, arter squintin' at it,' sez he, 'till my eye-kivers got so heavy I had to put splinters under 'em to prop 'em up, I riz up on to my travelin' pins, and sot out on a explore, to see ef 'twas the ghost of a white man or Injin. On that,' sez he, 'the ghost got miffed, and, makin' jest one step, stood right plum beside me.'

" 'Ben Bose,' sez the ghost, 'I want you.'

" 'And so does Old Nick,' sez Ben.

" 'Well, I'm him,' sez the ghost; and at that Ben sez

the thing jest turned black in the face, and looked orful skeerful.

“‘Hadn’t you better wait till I git ready?’ axed Ben.

“‘No,’ sez the old chap, ‘I want you now;’ and at that Ben sez he took hold on him, and his fingers felt hot as burnt pitch.

“‘Wall,’ sez Ben, ‘I jest clinched into him, and sich a tussle you never seed. Fust me and then Brimstone, and then Brimstone and me, for two mortal hours. But, by hokey, I licked!’ sez Ben; ‘and the feller mosied with a flea in his ear, and his tail hangin’ down like a licked puppy’s.’

“Now, boys,” continued Black George, “as I’ve said afore, Ben was the all-fireddest liar on ‘arth, or else I mought a b’lieved so’tthin’ o’ this; for he hadn’t but jest done spinnin’ it, when bang, bang, bang—whizz, whizz, whizz—yehup! yeaoh! whirp! come ringin’ in our ears, as ef the ‘arth was all alive with shootin’ Injins—and that’s a scripter, dog-gone fact, as I’m a gentleman! (Somebody gin me a chawr!—augh!)

“‘Oh, the infarnals!’ sez Ben, jumpin’ up and showin’ blood on his noddle. ‘I’m dead meat, sartin. But I’ll hev company along,’ sez he; and he ups and blazes away, and throwed the nigh one, as was comin’ up, right purty.

“‘Two on ‘em,’ sez I, ‘for a pint;’ and old Sweetlove gin the second one the double-up, instanter.

“‘Now, let’s dodge,’ sez Ben, ‘and keep our ha’r;’ and with that he grabbed hold o’ me, and both on us put out for the hills.

“But Ben ud got a settler, and felt top-heavy. He traveled ‘bout fifty yard, with my arm in hisn, and five yellin’ devils close behind us; and then he pitched on to me, and said he’d got to quit, and axed me to lift his ha’r* and keep it from the cussed Injins. I hated to do it like darnation—but thar wasn’t no help. Ef I didn’t, the skunks would; and so I outs with my butcher, and off come his sculp afore you could say beans.

“‘Thankee,’ sez Ben. ‘Good-bye, old hoss, and put out, or you’ll lose two on ‘em.’

* Take his scalp.

"I knowed he war right ; and though I hated to quit, I seed thar was no help, and I started for the old castle yonder, fodderin' Sweetlove as I went. I hadn't got fur, when I knowed by the yell the rascals had come up to him. They 'spected to make a raise thar, and two stopped for his fur, and the rest followed me. Ben was cunnin' though, and they didn't never tell what happ'd—they fellers didn't—I'll be dog-gone ef they did ! Ben kind o' played possum, and they thought he was gone under ; and so, while they was foolin' thar time, Ben had his eye skinned, burnt his pups'* powder, and throwed both on 'em cold right han'some, and then turned over and kicked the bucket hisself. I managed to plug another jest about then, and the other two scamps sot off instanter for a more sal-u-bri-ous clime—they did—and ef you'd only seed 'em streak it, you'd a thought lightnin' warn't no whar.

"Why, jest to tell the clean truth, I'll be dog-gone ef they didn't travel so fast that a streak o' fire followed 'em, and the animals as had been snoozin' on thar way, waked up and looked out, and concluded the 'arth was burnin' most conscimptiously, and so put out arter them same flyin' humans. Fact, by Judas ! and ef you don't b'lieve it, you ken jest bile me for a persimmon and no questions axed."

"Oh, of course," said I, as Black George paused and looked around triumphantly, "we all believe it, and I should like to see the man that would not."

"Faith, now," chimed in Teddy, tipping me the wink, "the man that wouldn't belave all that asy, wouldn't belave that the moon's made o' green cheese, nor that Metooselah (blissings on his name of scripter mimory !) was twice as big as a maating-house."

"Ha ! ha ! ver fine !" chimed in the Frenchman, rubbing his hands and giving a peculiar shrug. "I am ver moche delight. I sall pelieve him till I pe von—vot you call him—gray beard, eh !"

The other mountaineers laughed, winked at one another, but made no reply ; and Black George resumed, with all the gravity of a parson :

* Pistols.

"Wall, sence you b'lieve it, I don't see no use as I'll hev to prove it, and that's so'thin' gained. Wall, when I seed the field was cl'ar, I jest mosied back to Ben, to see how he'd come out, for then I didn't know. I shuffled up to him, and thar I seed the varmints lyin' by his side, clean meat and nothin' else, and Ben Bose as dead nor a biled kitten. I felt kind o' orful for a while, and had to play the squaw a leetle, jest for old acquaintance's sake.

"When I'd rubbed the water out o' my spy-glasses, I sot to work, dug a hole, and kivered Ben over decent, at least a foot below wolf-smell. Then I went a ha'r raisin', and lifted all the skunks' top-knots, took all thar muskets and powder, and sot down to my lone camp-fire, feelin' as used up and womanish as ef I'd shuk with the ager a month. The only feel-good I had that night, was hearin' the infarnal wolves tearin' the meat off o' them dirty scamps' bones.

"The next mornin' I sot on ag'in, and took on Ben's muleys, and it was a purty considerable time afore I made another trail in this here valley. Thar, you've got the meat o' the story, and I'm done—augh!"

Though more familiar with mountain life and all its rough scenes than when I first heard the old trapper relate his adventures, yet the tale he had just told, in his rude, off-hand way, produced many painful feelings.

The story, in the main, I believed to be true—at least that part which related to the death of the trapper—and I could not avoid some very unpleasant reflections.

Who was Ben Bose? and how came he here? Had he any near and dear relatives? Ay, perchance he had a mother—a sister—who knows but a wife and children?—all of whom loved him with a pure affection. He had been driven, it might be, by the stern arm of necessity, to gain a living for himself and them among the wild fastnesses of the mountains. He had toiled and struggled, perhaps braved dangers and hardships, with the bright hope of one day returning to them, to part no more in life.

And they, all ignorant of his untimely fate, had possibly been—nay, might be now—anxiously looking for

his return. Alas, if so, they must forever look in vain ! No news of him, perhaps, would ever reach their ears—and certainly no Ben Bose would ever again appear. Should they venture, however, to make inquiry among the trappers who had known him, what painful tidings would the common brief rejoinders, “he’s gone under,” or “been rubbed out,” convey to them, and how lacerate their sinking hearts ! Poor fellow ! Here he slept his last sleep, unheeding and unheeded, his memory forgotten, or recalled only on an occasion like this as a fire-side pastime.

“Alas,” sighed I, “what an unenviable fate ! and how many hundred poor human beings like him are doomed to share it !”

I was recalled from my ruminations by hearing clamors for a story from Teddy, who, now that Black George had told his, seemed but little inclined to favor us.

“Remember your promise,” said I, joining in with the others.

“Faith,” answered Teddy, resorting to his peculiar habit, when puzzled or perplexed, of scratching his head ; “faith, now, gintlemen, if ye’ll allow a poor body like mesilf to obsarve, it’s me mother’s own son as is thinking it’s a mighty tight fix I’m in. Troth, ye axes me for a story, and it’s hardly one that mesilf knows to tell yees ! Och ! I have it now !” he exclaimed, his eyes brightening with a sudden thought ; “I have it now, claan at me fingers’ inds ! I’ll tell yees how I comed to lave ould Ireland—the swaat land o’ murphies and murdering fine ladies—bliss their angel sowls, ivery baastly one on ’em ! barring the baastly part, now, which I only mintioned by way of smoothing the sintence.”

“Yes, yes, give us the yarn,” cried a voice ; “and don’t spin it too long, for it’s gittin’ late.”

“Ay, Teddy,” I added, “I think that will do—only make it short.”

“By gar,” rejoined Pierre, having recourse to his box, “I think so, Monsieur. Cut him off so—von, two, tree feets—and zen him be von ver exsallent good, eh ? Je le crois.”

“Will, ye sae, thin, gintlemen,” resumed Teddy, “to

begin at the beginning, as Father Murphy used to say whin he wint to carve a chicken tail foremost, I was born in ould Ireland, not a thousand miles from Cor-r-k, iayther ways. Me father (pace to his ashes, barring I niver saan the proof that he was me father, and there was dispute about it), was a gintleman laborer, as had plenty to do all his life and little to ate. He loved whisky, the ould chap, spaking riverintly; and one day he took it into his head to die, by token as he said there wasn't air enough for iverybody to brathe, and he'd jist sacrifice himself a marthyr for the good of others.

"Will, me mother, she became a widdy in coorse, and took on mighty bad about her Saint Denis, as she called me dead father—though it's little of a saint as she thought him whin living—and so, to drown her sorrow, she took to the bothel too, and soon after died spaachless, calling for wather, wather, the ounly time I'd iver heerd her mintion it, and by token o' that I knowed she was uncanny.

"Will, gintlemen, ye sae, by raason of both me parents dying, I was lift a hilpless infant orphan of fourteen, widout father or mother, or a shilling in me pocket, or a divil of a pocket in me coat, barring that it wasn't a coat at all, at all, ounly rags sowed thegither, jist. Me father's and mother's estate comprehinded ounly a bed, some pots and kithles, two broken stools, and a table as had its legs cut off for kindling wood. So, ye sae, that was soon sittled; and thin I was lift a poor, houseless wanderer, widout a place to go to, or a relation in the wide wor-r-ld, barring three brothers as was away, an uncle, two aunts, and about a dozen cousins, all poorer nor mesilf. Will, I took to crying for a living, and a mighty nice time I had on't, till one day Father Murphy come along and axed me would I like to come and live wid him. Faith, now, an' maybe it wasn't long saying yis I was.

"Now's you're afther having a short story, I'll skip over four years, and till yees what turned up thin, by way of variety.

"The praast, Father Murphy, ye sae, had a beauthiful niece, as was jist me age, barring that she was a couple

o' years younger. Now ye must know I iver had a fondness for the famale sex, and I kind o' took to liking Kathleen by raason of natheral instinct. And Kathleen, the darling! she sort o' took to liking me betimes—more by token I was a dacent body, and she hadn't iny one bether to like; and so, betwaan us, we both thought about each other waking, and damed about 'em in our slaap. Now divil a word did the praast know of it, at all, at all, and that was all the bether for the pair of us.

“At last I got to making love to her, and tilling her she was too swaat a being to be living all alone by herself jist; and that if her poor parints should be took away, like mine was, and she become a poor orphan like meself, what would she be afther doing for a protictor, and all thim things? She cried, she did, and she sez :

“‘Teddy,’ sez she, ‘what would become o’ me?’

“‘It’s not knowing,’ I sez, ‘and it’s a mighty har-r-d thing to go by guess work on sich occasions.’

“At that she cried the more, by token her inner faalings was touched, and axed me would I contrive a way to git her out o’ her throubles.

“‘Ah, faith,’ sez I, all of a sudden, ‘I have it now!’

“‘What is, Teddy, dear!’ sez she.

“‘Och! come to your Teddy’s arms, and he’ll be father, and mother, and victuals and drink to yees, my own swaat Kathleen!’ I sez.

“Ah, the darling!” pursued Teddy—“blissings on her sowl, be it where it will! and pace to her ashes, if she’s dead, which I’m not knowing, and hoping conthra-wise—she fill right into me arms, and comminced crying jist like wather dripping through a sieve. And thin, ye sae, I cried too, more by token o’ saaing her cry than that I felt bad like, at all, jist. Will, I wiped me eyes wid me sleeve, and had jist begun to say comfortable things to her, whin who should happen along but the praast, her uncle!

“‘Och, ye spalpeen! and what is it ye’re at there, ye villain?’ sez he.

“At this Kathleen give an awful scraam, and rin for the house, laving me alone to fight the mather out. I

felt mighty small jist thin, ye'd better belave, and wished wid all me heart an arthquake would open and swaller the pair of us.

"I saan the praast was in a dangerous timper, and I knowed something was coming, asy as squaaling to a pig. But I'll not provoke his riverince, I sez to mesilf, or he'll jist murther me outright, widout judge or jury.

"'Who are ye?' sez he, coming up and taking me by the collar of me coat, barring that me coat had no collar, and I stood in me shirt sleeves, jist. 'Who are ye?' sez he; and thin he shook me till me teeth rattled.

"'I'm Teddy O'Lagherty, your riverince,' sez I.

"'Ye're a baastly dog!' sez he.

"'Troth, and so was me father before me,' sez I; 'and hisn before that;' for I wanted to plase him.

"'Ye're a blaggard!' sez he.

"'That comes by nathur,' sez I.

"'Ye're a scoundrel—a villain—a maan, contimptible spalpeen!' sez he.

"'Sure, and that comes by associations,' sez I.

"At this Father Murphy got as rid in the face as a baat, and I thought he would swaller me widout cooking or buther.

"'What was yees adoing here wid Kathleen?' sez he.

"'Loving her, your riverince,' sez I.

"'And how dare you love sich as she?' sez he.

"'Troth, and I'm thinking her as good as mesilf, your riverince,' I sez.

"At that I thought he'd choke himsilf, he held his grip so tight upon his own throat. Jabers! but it was rejoicing I was that it wasn't mesilf's he fingered that a ways.

"'Teddy,' sez he, afther a bit, and spaking more calm like, though I knowed the divil was behind it all: 'Teddy, I'm goin' to have yees whipped to death, and thin sint away for a baastly vagabone, to arn yees own living in the cowl'd world!' sez he.

"'Jist as plases your riverince,' sez I. 'But, sure,

ye'll be afther knowing I've done many worse things than love the swaat Kathleen, blissings on her sowl !'

" 'And do ye raaly love her?' sez he, in a softer voice.

" 'Och, your riverince, and is it mesilf as loves good eatables, now ?'

" 'Will, thin,' sez he, 'for the sake of me niece, as is the apple o' me eye, I'll pardon yees, on one condition.'

" 'And, sure, what might that be, your riverince?' sez I.

" 'That ye'll lave the counthry, and niver come into it agin,' sez he.

" 'What,' sez I, faaling me anger rising, 'and lave darling Kathleen all alone by hersilf, widout a pro-tictor ! Be jabbers, Father Murphy, it's me own mother's son as ud sae me own head cut off first, and thin I wouldn't.'

" 'What!' sez he, gitting his dander riz agin ; 'and does yees dare to talk that a ways to me, as has raised yees from poverty to be me own sarving man, and gin ye the bist of ivery thing as was lift whin we and the pigs had all done ? Say that to me face, as has been a father to yees, ye ungrateful varlet ? I'll have yees horse-whipped out of town, so I will !'

" 'And if ye does,' sez I, 'I'll staa around and rin off wid Kathleen, as sure's me name's Teddy O'Lagherty, and Dennis O'Lagherty was me father'—which wasn't so sure, d'ye mind ! but Father Murphy didn't know that.

" This put him to thinking agin ; and afther a bit he sez, quite amiable like :

" 'An' sure you wouldn't be afther doing that, now, to one as has trated ye iver wid sich respict, Misther O'Lagherty ?' sez he.

" 'Howly Moses !' thinks I ; 'what's a coming now ? Ayther a mighty sto-r-m, or sunshine, sure—for I'd niver hearn the praast spaak that ways afore.

" 'Misther O'Lagherty,' sez he, agin, 'I love ye.'

" 'Faith,' sez I, 'and it's glad I am to hear the likes, more by raason ye niver showed the faaling at all, at all.'

" 'Will, ye think of gitting Kathleen—but it's all in your eye,' sez he. 'She don't care for ye, me son !'

“ ‘That’s a lie !’ sez I—‘begging your riverince’s pardon for spaaking plain Inglish!’

“ ‘Father Murphy bit his lips, and his two eyes looked jist like fire-balls, they did.

“ ‘Will,’ sez he, sez Father Murphy, ‘we’ll let that pass : but she can niver be yourn, Teddy, by raason of her being bargained to another.’

“ ‘That alters the case,’ sez I.

“ ‘It does,’ sez he. ‘Now, ye sae, me son, ye can’t make nothing by staying round here—not a bit of it—and as I maan to do the gintaal by yees, I’d like to be knowing what ye’d ax to lave the counthry, and have the money down?’

“ ‘And, sure, where’d I go?’ sez I.

“ ‘To Amirica,’ sez he.

“ ‘Will, I’d al’ays hearn of Amirica—and what a blissed counthry it was for liberty, ladies and poor folks—and the notion plazed me ; and besides, I knowed what the praast said about my niver gitting Kathleen was thrue. So I thinks it over a wee bit, and sez :

“ ‘Why, Father Murphy,’ sez I, ‘saaing it’s you, and you’re a gintleman I respict, I’ll go, if ye’ll give me dacent clothes, pay me passage out, and five pounds to dhrink your riverince’s health.’

“ ‘He wanted to baat me down ; but I saan I had him, and I swore divil a step would I stir widout he’d do my axing. At last sez he :

“ ‘Teddy, I’ll do it, if ye’ll agree to start right off, and niver sae Kathleen agin—otherwise I won’t.’

“ ‘It’s har-r-rd, so it is,’ sez I ; but I was afeard he’d back out if I didn’t accept soon, and so I towld him, ‘It’s a bargain, your riverince.’

“ ‘Stay a minnet, thin,’ sez he ; and he rin into the house and brought me out ten sovereigns. ‘These’ll pay everything,’ sez he ; ‘and so lave now, and niver show your dirty face here agin, or I’ll have yees up for staaling.’

“ ‘Troth,’ sez I, feeling like a lord, wid me hands on the goold, ‘it’s not throubled wid me ye’ll be agin soon ! The top o’ the morning to your riverince !’ and so I left him.

"Will, to wind up, I comed to Amirica, and spint all me fortune, and then wint to work and earned more money, and thin wint thraveling to sae what I could find, whin, blissings on me luck (turning to me), I fill into your honor's sarvice, for which good bit of accident I'm mighty glad now ! That's me story."

At the moment Teddy concluded, and ere a single comment or remark had escaped our lips, a frightful volley of musket balls flew round us like hail ; and one of our party, springing up with a yell, fell back a corpse.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A DESPERATE FIGHT WITH INDIANS.

"NDIANS !" was the simultaneous cry which burst from our lips, as each man grasped his rifle and sprung to his feet.

"Tree, boys !" cried Black George, just as a series of terrific yells resounded on all sides, and a host of dusky figures were seen bearing down upon us from every direction but one, which seemed providentially left open for our safety.

Toward this, the only point of compass possible for us to escape without a personal conflict, we fled precipitately, and soon reached a small clump of trees, which afforded us immediate protection, leaving our dead comrade in possession of the savages.

With yells of triumph a dozen of the latter rushed up to the unfortunate trapper, and one of the number instantly tore off his scalp, while several others buried their knives in his body to make sure of their victim.

Meantime the rest of the party, which consisted of some thirty in all, made for our retreat, uttering demoniac yells of barbarous exultation, doubtless fancying us an easy prey.

"Now, boys," cried Black George, in a stentorian voice, "every man pick a Injin, and guv the skunks thunder!"

His advice did not need a repetition; for scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when crack went our six rifles; and, almost miraculous to record, six of the foremost assailants rolled howling in the dust—each man, by a friendly providence, having selected a separate target with a fatal aim.

This was a result as unlooked for by us as alarming to our foes, who suddenly halted and rent the air with howls of rage and dismay.

While it staggered them, it gave us courage, and in the moment of their indecision and our triumph the voice of Black George was heard shouting the inspiring words:

"Wall done, boys! Foller me, and let us bark our pups and butcher at close quarters!"

Saying this, he sprung forward with a yell, a proceeding we all imitated; and before the astonished savages were fully aware of what was taking place, they found us in their midst, shouting, shooting and cutting, with a daring, activity and ferocity they had probably never seen equaled.

So suddenly had we become assailants in turn, and so vigorously did we press upon them, that they instantly wavered, became confused, and, after a slight resistance, took to flight, leaving four more of their number to keep company with the first unfortunate six.

Being all more or less experienced in Indian warfare, we were consequently wise enough not to follow them, well knowing they would return to the charge as soon as pressed into cover.

Both of Black George's companions had been wounded in the *melee*, but not dangerously, and we now congratulated ourselves with a triumphant shout on our success.

"Reckon they'll stay put till we kin butcher and raise these here dogs' ha'r," said the old trapper; and forthwith all set to work, save myself, in killing the wounded and scalping the slain.

When this bloody business was over, Black George observed :

"This heyar coon wonders how the rascals feels now ! Mayhap they've got a notion in thar heads that they're some in a b'ar-fight. Sarved 'em right, the blasted possums ! What business had they to be pitching into us, when we was tellin' stories and troublin' nobody ! Augh !"

"By gar, I tink so !" added the Frenchman, as he gave his olfactory organ an extra dose and his shoulders an unusually vigorous shrug. "Ha ! ha ! Monsieur Blake Shorge—you say ver moche true—sarve him right. Certainment, he got von most ver good exsallant—vot you call him—drubbing, eh ? Ha ! ha ! certainment."

"Och, now, but didn't the blaggards look a wee bit astonished, the spalpeens !" joined in Teddy. "Faith ! but I thought whin they rin, maybe as it was a race they was rinning for whisky or the likes."

"Well," said I, "we have been fortunatè so far, that is certain ; and now let us take care for the future. Load quick, my friends, and let us bring our animals together, or the Indians may rally and dash upon them and leave us in a bad condition."

"Right, boy !" cried Black George, with a start : "I'd forgot. What an old fool I is sometimes ! Quick ! or the skunks will head us—for I knows 'em of old."

Fortunately for us the Indians had not as yet made a seizure of our horses—which, at the time of the attack, were quietly feeding in the valley, but were now running to and fro and snuffing the air)—thinking, I suppose, that victory for them was certain, and well knowing that an attempt to take the animals first would create an alarm and perhaps defeat their design of making us their victims. Our possibles, too, had escaped them, probably from being concealed under the brushwood collected for our fire, and also from their being put to flight so suddenly.

All these were certainly matters for congratulation ; and hurriedly removing our property beyond the fire-light, I ordered Teddy and Pierre to guard it with their

lives ; while the rest of us, having reloaded our rifles, set off to collect our animals.

We had not been any too soon in this matter ; for the Indians, having recovered from their first alarm and confusion, were now espied dodging from tree to tree, with the evident intention of getting between us and the beasts and capturing the latter.

"Heyar's a fix," observed Black George, making a halt. "Ef we go for'ard the cussed varmints will pick us off and make meat on us ; and ef we stay here-a-ways, they'll cotch our critters and leave us to foot it. I'll be dog-gone ef it don't look like a dilemmer, as I hearn a scholard say onc't—that's a fact."

It was a dilemma, sure enough, and how to act was a matter of great moment. We could not charge upon the savages as we had done before, for they had "treed" in every direction, and, as Black George observed, would be sure to pick us off singly. To lose our animals was not to be thought of, for this would in a measure place us in their power. What was to be done ? Several propositions were made by one and another, but all in turn rejected as being impracticable.

Meantime the Indians were not inactive ; and though the night was without moon, we could occasionally perceive a figure flitting before us like a shadow, and the circle they had made around our horses gradually narrowing. It was a time for action of some kind, and yet we stood irresolute.

At length the old trapper suggested that we should separate, and each shift for himself in the manner best calculated to annoy our foes. This was the best plan as yet proposed, and was instantly adopted.

We had already begun to put it into execution, when, to our astonishment, a small body of horsemen, with loud yells, suddenly dashed out from a distant thicket, and, separating, bore down upon the rear of our enemies.

The next moment we heard the sharp crack of fire-arms, mingled with the shouts of the assailants, and yells of terror from the surprised Indians, who instantly took to flight in all directions.

In their confusion a portion ran toward us, and were received by a well-directed volley, which wounded one, killed two, and increased the alarm of the survivors, who instantly changed their course and fled toward the western hills, only to find their flight intercepted by an occasional horseman.

"Don't know who fights for us," cried Black George, "and don't care a kick—but know they's some—and so let's arter 'em, and disconflumicate the infarnal skunks all we kin."

Saying this, the trapper set forward in eager chase of the flying foe, an example we all followed, and for the next quarter of an hour the valley presented an indescribable scene of confusion and excitement.

Nothing of life could be seen but flying fugitives, hotly pursued by a bitter enemy, whose only mercy was instant death; and nothing heard but shrieks, yells, groans and shouts of triumph—these from victors, those from vanquished—together with the constant sharp crack of fire-arms, and the clashing of knives, as here and there two met in personal and deadly conflict. To use a military phrase, the rout was total, the enemy badly beaten, and the victorious skirmishers only withdrew from the field of conflict for want of a foe.

During the *melee* we had all become mixed up; and but for the distinguishing difference of color and equipments, we might, owing to the darkness, have made sad havoc with our best friends.

But the new-comers were whites, and there was no difficulty in distinguishing between them and the savages. Who they were, and how they had come here so opportunely for us, were enigmas I had no time nor opportunity to solve till the affray was over. Whoever they were, however, they were brave to a fault—if I may call that courage a fault which is reckless of self-preservation—and they fought like demons.

One of their party, whom I took to be the leader, displayed an agility, intrepidity and fierceness I had never seen equaled but once. Mounted on a fiery steed, which seemed to comprehend his slightest wish, he rushed among the frightened savages; and twice, as he passed

near me, did I observe him bend from his saddle, seize the scalp-lock of an Indian, and stab him in the neck, only slightly checking the speed of his horse.

A long, loud shout at last attested our complete victory; when I, in company with my companions, approached our deliverers, to return our sincere thanks for their timely aid.

Moving up to the personage I supposed to be the leader, who now sat quietly on his horse, surrounded by a dozen stalwart figures, all mounted, I said :

"Whom have I the honor to thank for this invaluable assistance at a point of time so critical to us?"

"Why, as to thanks," answered the one addressed, in a voice that seemed familiar to me, "I don't 'spect thar's any needed; but ef you thank anybody, thank all—for every man's done his duty, and nothing more."

"I fancy I know your voice," I rejoined, "but I cannot see your features."

"Well, it struck me as I'd heard your's afore," returned the intrepid horseman; and he bent forward in his saddle for a closer scrutiny of my person.

At this moment Black George came up, and, casting one glance at the speaker, exclaimed :

"Kit Carson, or I'm a liar! Reckon you knows old Black George, don't ye?" and in an instant the two were shaking hands with the hearty familiarity of old friends.

"Kit Carson!" cried I, in surprise. "Well, sir, I might have known it was you, from your manner of fighting;" and in turn I seized his hand with one of my strongest grips.

"You have a leetle the advantage of me yet," said Kit, when I had done.

"I presume you have not forgotten Frank Leighton, and the fight at Bitter Cottonwood?" I replied.

"Good heavens! is it indeed you? Why, I thought you war rubbed out thar, and I've never heard anything of you sence. I'm glad to see you, sir;" and an extra grip and shake of the hand convinced me he meant what he said. "I'll have a talk with you, by-and-by; but just

now we mountain men hev got a right smart chance at sculping—after which I'm at your service."

While most were occupied in the barbarous practice (I can never call it by a milder term), of scalping the slain, I called Teddy, Pierre and one or two others to my aid, and proceeded to collect and picket the frightened animals.

This was no easy task, and it was at least an hour before order and quiet were again restored.

In the meantime the Indians were scalped and rifled of everything valuable, and then left to feed the wolves, some of which had already begun their feast, and were fast being joined by others.

Of the slain, we counted in all twenty-three carcasses ; so that it was evident that only a few, perhaps only five or six, escaped, and these doubtless more or less wounded. Of my party, not one was injured in this last affray ; but several of the horsemen had received cuts and stabs, though none of a dangerous character.

When we had all collected around the camp-fire, the wounded were looked to, and their wounds dressed as well as circumstances would allow.

This done, we proceeded to bury the mountaineer, who had been killed, as the reader will remember, at the onset.

As soon as all these matters were arranged, we squatted down in a circle round the fire, to talk over the events of the last two hours.

I now had an opportunity of conversing with Carson, which I eagerly embraced. I informed him, in brief, of all that had occurred since we last met, and listened to a hasty recital of his own adventures, the principal part of which referred to Fremont's first expedition, and is already before the public.

He said that, after parting with Fremont, he had been engaged to conduct a party to California, and was on his return to St. Louis, by way of Uintah Fort, St. Vrain, and Fort Laramie, when, stopping at the first mentioned, he found the present party of adventurers anxious to obtain a guide to Taos, and thence to Santa Fé, and that they had induced him to accompany them

as far as Taos. He said they had been on our trail for some time, but had not come in sight of us until the present evening, when, camping just the other side of one of the surrounding hills, he, in a short ramble, had accidentally discovered our camp-fire and had determined on joining us in the morning. The attack on us by the Indians had been heard, and as soon as possible thereafter the whole party had come to our aid, with what result the reader knows.

He further added that it was rumored that Fremont had begun his second expedition, and was even now on his route westward by way of Bent's Fort—that he was anxious to join him—and that if an arrangement could be effected to do without him, he would in the morning cross over to the valley of the Arkansas and take a direct course for Bent's.

In answer to my inquiries concerning Prairie Flower and her tribe, he said he had not met with any of them since the battle of Bitter Cottonwood, but that he had heard of their being in this part of the country quite recently, and was inclined to believe them somewhere in the neighborhood of Taos at the present time. With regard to my friend, he expressed much sorrow for his loss, but could give me no information concerning him.

I was now more than ever anxious to find the Mysterious Tribe; for something whispered me that Prairie Flower had been in search of my friend—or at least was now with her tribe on that errand—or, if neither of these surmises should prove correct, that I could perhaps prevail upon them to assist me. At all events I determined on finding them as soon as possible, and accordingly resolved to start at daylight and push through to Taos with all haste.

Busy thoughts prevented me from sleeping on that eventful night, and at the first tinge of morning light I awoke my companions for the journey.

As we all had one destination, the party of Carson consented to part with him and join mine; and shaking my hand, with a hearty prayer for my success, he set off alone over the mountains, while we continued down the valley of the Rio Grande.

CHAPTER XL.

GAIN TIDINGS OF MY FRIEND.



Our party was now quite formidable, we had no fears of again being attacked so long as we remained together.

On the fourth day from quitting the valley described in the previous chapter, we entered the small village of Taos.

Here I found a collection of all nations and colors, consisting of trappers, hunters, traders, adventurers, and so forth.

Mingling with all classes, I at once proceeded to make inquiries regarding the present whereabouts of the Great Medicine Tribe, and also if any had seen or heard of a certain young man (giving a full description of Huntly) being taken prisoner by the Indians or Mexicans.

To my first inquiry, I received from several the answer, that a singular tribe of Indians, among whom was a beautiful female, had been seen in the vicinity within a few weeks; but where they now were, or in what direction, none could tell. As to the latter, each replied, with a shake of the head, that he could tell me nothing. It was not an uncommon thing, they informed me, for a white man, an adventurer, to be taken, robbed, held for ransom, knocked on the head, or sold into slavery; but no one remembered hearing of, or seeing, such a person as I described.

To me this news produced great disappointment; for, from some cause, which I cannot explain, I had been sanguine of getting information of Huntly so soon as I should arrive at Taos. Here, then, was a complete overthrow of my most ardent hopes! and I now felt keenly the weakness of the foundation on which I had reared my expectations. I might pass a long life in a wearisome

and dangerous search, and yet be no wiser concerning Huntly's fate at last.

There was still a faint hope that Prairie Flower, who I doubted not had gone south with her tribe for this purpose, had gained some information of him ; and at once I determined on finding her, with the additional resolve, that, should my surmises prove correct, and she had failed also, to set out on my return forthwith.

The day following my arrival in Taos, I was passing along one of the streets, pondering upon these matters, when I chanced to meet an old mountaineer, whom I did not remember having seen before.

Determined to leave no stone unturned, I accosted him with the same inquiry I had made of the others.

He stopped, looked at me attentively a moment, as if to comprehend my questions, and then, in a musing, half-soliloquizing manner, replied :

" 'Bout the Injins, don't know—think I've seed sich—won't be sartin—don't like to be sartin when I ain't. Yes ! think I hev seed 'em—yes, know I hev—but it war two year ago, and away up north a thundering ways. Fact. 'Bout the other chap, don't know—yes—no—stop—let me see—y-e-s, I reckon—ain't sartin—what was he like ?"

Here I proceeded to give a description of my friend, with what conflicting feelings of hope and fear I leave the reader to imagine. In fact my voice became so tremulous that several times I was forced to stop and put my hand to my throat to prevent as it were my heart from strangling me.

" Git cool, and jest say that thar over agin," rejoined the other, when at length I tremblingly paused for his answer.

I repeated it twice, before he seemed satisfied.

" Now," said he, " I'll think—let me see !" and he deliberately proceeded to take up each point of my description, and apply it to some person he had seen, making his own comments as he went along. " Slim and graceful—let me see !—yes—no—y-e-s—rather reckon he was—know it—fact. 'Bout twenty-three—stop—let me think !—yes—reckon he mought be—know he was—sar-

tin. Good face—han'some featur's—stop—a—y—e—s—know it—settled."

Thus he went on until I found my patience completely exhausted, and was about to interrupt him, when he suddenly exclaimed :

"Seen him, stranger, sartin as life—know I has."

"Where? where?" cried I, breathlessly, grasping his hand.

"San Domingo."

"When?"

"'Bout a year ago!"

"God be thanked! You are sure?"

"Sartin, or I'd never said it."

"Well! well!—what became of him?"

"It's more'n I can say—s'pect he war made a slave. A rummy old Greaser had him, and wanted to sell or git him ransomed. He axed too high, and nobody traded. I pitied the poor feller, but I hadn't no money, and thar warn't no Yankees thar then to help me out in takin' him. Old Greaser went sothe; and some I axed shuk thar heads, and said that old scamp war a robber chief and had lots o' help close by. All I know, stranger."

"But do you think he is alive now?"

"Can't say, ye see, 'cause don't know. Never say what don't know. Anything more to ax, stranger?"

"Nothing that you can answer," I replied; and thanking him kindly for his information, I placed a gold coin in his hand, and hurriedly left him, to seek out my companions—my spirits, so lately depressed, now buoyant and bounding.

The party which had joined mine at the valley, had not yet quitted Taos; and calling all together, I proceeded to lay before them my joyful intelligence.

When I had done, Black George gave a shout, Teddy a whoop, Pierre shrugged his shoulders and doubled his dose of snuff, and every one expressed his delight in his own peculiar way.

The Rovers—so our new companions termed themselves—were nearly all young men from the States, who had come West more for adventure than speculation; and as I had become a favorite with them in the short

time of our acquaintance, they at once volunteered me their assistance—an offer which I accepted, with tears of gratitude.

Ordering out our animals, we mounted and set forward immediately, and, although the day was partly advanced, succeeded in reaching Santa Cruz about nightfall.

By noon of the next day we rode into Santa Fé—a place of much importance and notoriety, from being centrally located on the great caravan route from Missouri to Southern California.

At the time of which I write, Santa Fé contained some four or five thousand inhabitants, and was the emporium of the Northern trade between New Mexico and Missouri. It was anything but an agreeable place, however—its inhabitants being mostly made up of the off-scourings of the earth—without religion, morality, or any other noble quality. To gamble, steal, rob and murder, were among the refined amusements of this most worthy set. To make matters still worse, there had recently been some difficulty between the Mexicans and the citizens of the United States, and on both sides existed a bitter hostility, which was productive of the most violent crimes. It was dangerous for any one to traverse the streets alone, particularly after nightfall, for at every corner he turned he knew himself in danger of assassination. The Indians here generally sided with the Mexicans, and looked upon all Yankees as their worst enemies.

Such was the state of affairs at Santa Fe on my arrival; and the same inimical feeling, to a greater or less extent, prevailed in all the adjacent towns.

As myself and party had no desire to quarrel with any one, we took care to be civil, always together, well armed, and to mind our own business on all occasions, and in consequence we fortunately escaped without molestation.

Making several inquiries in Santa Fé, and gaining nothing further of Huntly or the Mysterious Tribe, we pursued our course southward through Cinega to San Domingo.

Here the story of the old trapper was so far confirmed, that several persons remembered having seen the notorious robber, Gonzalez, in possession of a handsome young prisoner, whom he was anxious to dispose of, declaring he could not find it in his heart to kill him, and could not afford to part with him without recompense; that no one there being disposed to purchase him, he had gone further south; but as to what had since become of him none could afford me any information.

In answer to my inquiry concerning Prairie Flower, I learned that some time ago she had been seen in this vicinity with her tribe—that she had made inquiries similar to mine, and that all had departed southward.

This news almost made me frantic with joy. Huntly, I argued, was living; Prairie Flower, like some kind angel, had gone to his rescue; and it might be that even now he was free and enjoying her sweet companionship. The joyful thought, as I said, nearly drove me mad with excitement; and all my olden hopes were not only revived, but increased by faith to certainties.

Hurrying forward to San Bernilla, on the Rio Grande, I heard nearly the same tale as at San Domingo; and following down the river to Torreon, I listened to its repetition—and at Valencia, Nutrias and Alamilla likewise.

At Valverde, the next village below the last mentioned, I could gain no intelligence whatever.

This led me to think Gonzalez had disposed of his prisoner between the two villages—or, what was just as probable, had taken another course.

For what I knew, he might have crossed the Rio Grande and struck off into the Sierra de los Mimbres—a mountain chain only a few miles to the west of us—whose lofty, snow-covered peaks rose heavenward to a vast height, and had been distinctly visible to us for several days.

If he had taken this direction, the chances of tracing him successfully appeared much against us.

It was equally as probable, too, he had gone eastward—perhaps to Tabira—a small village some seventy miles distant.

But which course should we take?

Consulting my friends, we at length resolved to retrace our steps to Alamilla, make inquiries of all we might meet on the way, and then, if we could gain no satisfactory information, to strike out for Tabira on a venture.

This matter settled, we at once turned back; but we had not proceeded far when we met a couple of Mexican hunters.

As I understood a smattering of Spanish, I at once addressed them, and, in course of conversation, gained the joyful tidings that a prisoner, such as I described, had been purchased by a Mexican, living not more than three miles distant, and that in all probability we should find him there now.

The path to his residence having been pointed out, I rewarded each of my informants with a gold coin; and then, driving the spurs into our horses, in less than half an hour we reined them in before a small hacienda, much to the terror of the inmates, who believed we had come to rob and murder them.

Assuring the proprietor, a rather prepossessing Mexican, that in case he gave us truthful answers no harm should be done him—but that, being partially informed already, the slightest prevarication would cost him his tongue and ears, if not his head—I proceeded to question him.

Thus forewarned, and much in fear of the execution of the threat, he gave straightforward replies, to the effect that more than a year ago Gonzalez had paid him a visit, and offered him an American at a small price, declaring that if he did not purchase he would knock the prisoner in the head without more ado, as he had cost him more time than he was worth; that at first, he (the proprietor of the hacienda) had refused to buy, having as many slaves as he cared about; but that something in the young man's appearance, and the appeal he made with his eye, had touched his feelings, and the bargain had at length been struck. He further stated that the prisoner had not been treated like the rest of his slaves, but with more respect, and had behaved himself like a

gentleman and won his confidence. A short time ago, he continued, a small tribe of Indians had called upon him, and offered a ransom for the prisoner, stating he was an old acquaintance ; that he had accepted the offer, and the prisoner had departed with them, toward the north, in fine spirits.

This was the substance of the information I gathered here ; but it was enough to intoxicate me with joy, and was received by the rest of the party with three hearty cheers, much to the astonishment of the old Mexican, who did not comprehend what was meant.

The prisoner was Huntly, there was no doubt of that, and the Great Medicine was the Indian tribe which had set him free.

The next thing was to go in quest of them. They had gone toward the north, and had had some time the start of us. It might be difficult to find them—but nothing, I fancied, in comparison with the task I had first undertaken of tracing out my friend. The Rovers agreed to accompany me as far as Santa Cruz, when, having seen me so far safe, they designed returning to Santa Fé.

It is unnecessary for me to detail each day's journey.

Suffice, that in due time we arrived at Santa Cruz, where I parted from the Rovers, with many expressions of gratitude on my part, and heart-felt wishes for my success on theirs.

My party was thus reduced to six ; and as two of the number preferred remaining here to going north immediately, I settled with them at once, still retaining Teddy, Pierre and Black George.

With these I again set forward rapidly, making inquiries of all I met.

For two or three days I could get no tidings of the Mysterious Tribe, and I began to have doubts of being on the right course.

Fortunately, before we had decided on changing our direction, we met a party of mountaineers, who informed us that a few weeks before they had seen a small tribe of friendly Indians, somewhere between the Spanish Peaks and Pueblo, among whom were a white man and a beautiful female half-breed ; that they were moving

very leisurely toward the north ; and that in all probability they were now encamped somewhere in the beautiful valley of the Arkansas.

Elated with the most extravagant anticipations of soon realizing our sanguine hopes, we again pressed forward for two or three days ; and leaving the lofty Spanish Peaks to our right, tracing up the head waters of the Rio Mora, we struck off over the Green Mountains, and camped at last in the far-famed valley of the Arkansas, within full view of the eternally snow-crowned Pike's Peak.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE JOYFUL MEETING WITH MY FRIEND.



FOR two days after reaching the valley, our search proved fruitless, and the reader can better imagine my feelings than I can describe them.

My anxiety to see my long-lost friend was so great, that I could not rest at night, and barely devour enough food to support nature.

A consultation had resulted in shaping our course up the river ; and on the third day we had the unbounded delight to meet with a couple of trappers, who informed us they had seen the Great Medicine Tribe only two days before, and that they were then encamped on a small creek, in a lovely valley, at the base of the southwestern mountain chain, surrounding what is known as the South Park, not more than sixty or seventy miles distant.

Never can I forget the feelings I experienced, nor the wild, prolonged, and deafening cheers which resounded at this announcement. Each of my companions seemed frantic with joy ; and as for myself, I could have

clasped the informants, rough and half civilized as they were, to my beating heart.

Becoming at last a little more tranquil, we managed to impress upon ourselves a brief description of the route to be taken, and then we set forward with the wildness of madmen just loosened from an insane asylum.

On, on we dashed, over plain, heath and ridges, through thickets and streams, till the blowing and reeling of our animals warned us we must be more prudent, or their lives, at least, would be the penalty of our rashness.

Throughout that day nothing was thought of, nothing talked of, but our fortunate adventure, and the speedy prospect of gaining what we sought. Time, distance, everything, was everlooked; and when the sun went down, it appeared to us that the day had been by half the shortest of the season.

Very different was it with our horses, which were so exhausted from hard riding that serious fears were entertained lest we had ruined them. But a thorough rubbing down, and an hour or two of rest, revived them; and we at last had the satisfaction of seeing them crop the plentiful blade with their wonted gusto.

I slept none that night—in fact did not even lie down—but most of the time paced the earth to and fro before the fire-light, anxiously praying for the dawn, to resume our journey. My companions, however, slept soundly; for they had far less to think of than I, and moreover were sorely fatigued.

At the first blush of morning I roused them, and again mounting we set forward.

As both Pierre and Black George knew the country well, we lost no time by going out of the way, but took the nearest and safest course to the point described.

A ride of four hours brought us to the brow of a hill, looking down upon a fertile valley, where, joy inexpressible, we beheld a village of temporary lodges, and a few Indians, whom I instantly recognized as belonging to the anxiously-sought tribe.

“Hurray! we’ve got ’em—I’ll be dog-gone ef we

haint!" cried Black George. "Hurray for us beavers, sez I! and a quart on the feller as is last in!"

Uttering yell after yell, as wild as those of savages, we spurred down the hill with reckless velocity, each one striving to lead the rest and be the first to reach the goal of our present desires.

Had the tribe in question not been peaceably inclined, this proceeding would have been dangerous in the extreme, and a shower of rifle balls might have changed our joyous shouts to cries of pain and lamentation, or have put us beyond the pale of mortality.

Our rapid and tumultuous approach alarmed our friends; and men, women and children came running out of their huts, with fear depicted on their faces.

Among them were two figures that fixed my attention; and from that moment I saw nothing but Charles Huntly and Prairie Flower till my gallant beast stood panting in the center of the crowd.

"Charles!" I gasped, as I leaped from my steed, my brain fairly reeling with intense emotion; and, staggering up to where he stood, bewildered and confused, I threw my arms around his neck and swooned in his embrace.

When consciousness again returned, I found myself lying on a mat in a small cabin, hastily constructed of sticks and skins, and my friend standing by me, chafing my temples, dashing cold water in my face, and entreating me in the most piteous tones to arouse and speak to him. There were others around, but I heeded them not. I had neither ears, nor eyes, for any but my friend.

My first glance showed me that he was altered, but not more than I had expected to find him. His form was somewhat wasted, and his pale features displayed here and there a line of grief and suffering which I had never before seen.

"Frank," he cried, "for God's sake, look up, and speak to me!"

"Charles!" I gasped.

"Ha! I hear it again—that dearly loved voice!" and burying his head upon my breast he wept aloud.

In a few minutes I had completely recovered from my

swoon ; but it was a long time before either of us could master his emotion sufficient to hold conversation. We looked at each other, pressed each other by the hand, mingled our tears together, and *felt*, in this strange meeting, what no pen can describe, no language express. We had literally been dead to each other—we who had loved from childhood with that ardent love which cements two souls in one—and now we had come to life, as it were, to feel more intensely our friendship for the long separation. The excess of joy had nearly made us frantic, and taken away the power of speech.

At last we became more tranquil, when our friends, who had been present, but almost unnoticed, withdrew and left us to ourselves.

“And now, Frank,” said Huntly, looking me earnestly in the face, his eyes still dimmed with tears, “tell me the news? Have you been home?”

“I have not.”

“Ah! then I suppose you know nothing of our friends?”

“More than you imagine;” and I turned away my head, and sighed at the thought of the mournful intelligence I was about to communicate.

“Ha! what?” demanded Huntly, with tremulous anxiety. “Why do you avert your face? Has—has anything—happened?”

“Prepare yourself for the worst, dear Charles!” I replied, in a tremulous tone.

“For the worst?” he repeated. “Great Heaven! what has happened? Speak! quick! tell me! for suspense at such times is hard to be borne; and our imagination, running wild with conjecture, tortures us, it may be, beyond the reality.”

“In this case I think not.”

“In Heaven’s name, speak!” he gasped, with the pallor of death.

“Promise me to be calm!”

“I will do my best.”

His whole frame fairly trembled with excitement, and his forehead became damp with cold perspiration.

“Your father, dear Charles—” I began.

“Well? well?”

“Is—is—no more. The sod has twice been green above him.”

“Oh, gracious God!” he exclaimed, throwing his hands aloft, with a look of agony I shall never forget; and then, covering his face, he groaned as one in the throes of death.

For some time I did not disturb him, thinking it best to let his first grief take its course in silence. At length I said :

“Come, my dear friend, rouse up and be a man ! Do not give too much way to your sorrow ! Remember, that in this world we all have to die—that we are doomed by the immutable laws of nature, and the decrees of an over-ruling God, to part from those we most dearly love ! But it is only for a time. God is wise, and good, and does all things for the best ; and it is only a short time, at the longest, ere we in turn shall depart to join them in a life beyond the reach of death. Cheer up, dear Charles ! and look upon your father as one who has done with the cares and perplexities of life and made a happy change ! I know how dearly you loved him—I know the trial to give him up is most painful—and from my very soul I sympathize with you in your affliction. But, my dear friend, we have other duties than to bewail the dead ; for the living demand our attention ; and you have friends still left you, equally near and dear, who stand in need of your most iron energies.”

“Alas !” he groaned, his face still hid in his hands ; “dead ! dead ! dead !—and I—his only son—far, far away !” He paused, and trembled violently for a few moments, and his breath came quick and hard. “But you are right, dear Frank !” he said at length, slowly raising his face, now sadly altered. “You are right, my friend ! We know such things must, do, and will take place ; and we should, to what extent we can, be philosophers all, and strive to be resigned to God’s will. It is terrible, though—terrible—to lose a beloved parent, and not be at hand to hear his parting words, nor see him set forth on that journey from whence none ever return ! But I—I—will strive to bear it—to at least *appear* calm.

And now, dear Frank—my—my—I fear to mention whom—lest I hear more painful, heart-rending tidings!”

“You mean your mother and sister?”

He grasped my arm nervously, partly averted his head, as if in dread of my answer, and said, almost inaudibly:

“I do.”

“Be not alarmed, dear Charles! I left them well.”

“Left them well?” he repeated, in surprise. “Did you not tell me you had not been home?”

“True! neither have I.”

“Then where did you see them? and where are they now?”

“I will answer your last question first. They are now in Oregon City.”

He gave me a deep, searching look, such as one would bestow upon a person whose sanity he had just begun to question.

“I do not wonder you look surprised,” I added: “but listen ere you doubt;” and I proceeded to narrate, as briefly as I could, how I had met them near the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains, and under what singular circumstances; how I had soon learned of their misfortunes, both in the loss of their dearest friend and their property—(which latter seemed to affect Charles less than I had expected)—how I had there met the Unknown, been warned of danger by Prairie Flower, and what had followed; how I had subsequently accompanied the party to Oregon; how I had proposed to Lilian, been accepted, and on what conditions; and how I had at last been led to set off in search of my dearest friend, and what had happened on the journey.

In short, I gave him condensed particulars of all that had occurred since our parting, not forgetting my night search for him and the effect of his loss upon me at Los Angeles.

He listened attentively throughout, occasionally interrupting me with questions on points of more than usual interest, or where in my hasty narration I had failed to make the matter clear to him.

“Strange! strange!” he said, when I had done;

"very, very strange is all this ! It looks improbable—seems impossible—and yet I do not doubt your word. So, then, I am not worth a dollar ?"

"Do not let that trouble you, Charles ! While I have money, neither you nor your friends shall want."

"I know that, Frank," he said, pressing my hand warmly ; "I know that. That, at present, is the least of my concern. And so you have seen the Unknown ? and she is called Eva Mortimer ?" He mused a moment, and added : "Well, this is more singular than all ! Frank, we must set out for Oregon immediately."

"As soon as you please. And now tell me something of your own adventures ?"

"Alas !" sighed he, "after the painful news you have communicated, I feel myself unable to enter into particulars. I will give you something in brief, for I know your curiosity is excited. In fact, I will give you the outline of my story, and anon will fill it up with detail."

"Proceed."

"At the time we separated to follow the wounded animal," he began, "I hurried around the foot of the mountain which you were ascending. In my haste I missed the path, and had spent some time in searching for it, when suddenly I found myself surrounded by half-a-dozen guerillas, who it seems were in waiting for the return of a larger party, momentarily expected, when all designed an attack upon some merchants coming in from Santa Fé. A single glance showed me resistance would be useless, and I surrendered myself a prisoner. They seized and began stripping me of everything valuable, when it occurred to me I could let you know my situation, and I accordingly shouted, as if calling to a party of my friends. The next moment I was seized and gagged ; when the cowards—fearful I suppose that this precaution had been taken too late, (for a cheer from you was heard in answer,) and that they might be attacked soon if they remained where they were—began to sneak away, taking me with them."

"When they had rendered themselves safe, by penetrating further into the mountains, they kept quiet till

night, and then sallied forth to the rendezvous, where they joined the others, in all some twenty persons.

"A consultation was now held, as to whether I should be put to death or taken along and sold into slavery. The latter was finally adopted, and Gonzalez, the chief, took me under his charge.

"Taking the great Spanish Trail, we set off toward Santa Fé, traveling mostly in the night and lying by through the day, often in ambush for some unfortunate wayfarers, who, in the encounters that sometimes ensued, generally lost both money and life.

"My dear Frank, I could describe events which have passed before my own eyes that would make your hair stand with horror ; but as these are not necessary to my present story, I will omit them for the present.

"It was a strange fancy they had formed of selling me into slavery, and I could never rightly comprehend it. It could not have been for the amount I would bring—for that was small, in comparison to the trouble I must have cost them in guarding me from escape. No ! I am inclined to think it the result of a whim—perhaps of the chief—who ever treated me with as much leniency as I could expect, or have dared to ask for. Still I was made to do menial services and used as a slave ; and it might have been that my life was preserved for this ; for save myself the party had no servant. Oh, how it made my blood boil at times, when I thought what I had been, and what I was ! and how I groaned in secret, to think what must be your feelings, and the feelings of my friends, should the latter ever hear of my fate ! But I still had hope ; I was still alive ; and I struggled to bear up manfully, and be resigned to my lot till Providence should favor my escape.

"The first hundred miles I was forced to proceed on foot—the robbers having no horses but what they rode themselves. Sometimes they traveled fast, obliging me to keep them company, and in consequence I suffered most severely. At last one of the band got killed in an affray, and his beast was assigned to me, which proved a great relief.

"One day the chief informed me that if I would take

the oath of his dictation, I might join the band and have my freedom—or rather, the freedom of a robber. I declined his offer, in language so decisive that he never after repeated the proposition, and I continued as before a slave. But I must avoid detail.

“At last we reached the Sierra de los Mimbres, where the band divided—the chief and a few followers taking me down to San Domingo, where I was offered for sale. Not meeting with success here, he continued down through the several villages, and, in short, to the very hacienda whither you and another (God bless you both!) traced me. Had he failed here in disposing of me to Pedro Lopez, I do believe he would have put an end to my existence.

“After much quibbling, the bargain was at last struck, and I became the property of Pedro Lopez.

“I shall now pass over the period of my slavery—the most unhappy one of my life. True, I was treated better than my companions, and, on the whole, suffered much less physically than mentally. But still I knew myself a slave—knew I was degraded; and the thought of my position—that thus I might be doomed to spend my days—nearly drove me mad. Sometimes evil thoughts would enter my head; and then I would half resolve to kill my master and take the consequences, or put an end to my own being. Then hope would revive, that something might turn up for my deliverance, and I would labor on, and strive to be resigned to bide my time.

“Thus a year rolled around, when one day Pedro Lopez came to me and inquired if I was contented with my situation! At first I thought he was mocking me, and I half-raised a garden-tool I had in my hand to dash out his brains. He must have guessed my intention from my looks; for he took a step back, and bade me be calm and give him a civil answer. I replied by inquiring if he would feel contented to be a slave in a foreign land? He shook his head, and said he would not—that he had felt for my situation from the first—and that that was the cause of my being treated better than my companions. He then told me that as I had ever behaved myself with propriety, and as he had been offered a fair

ransom by a small tribe of Indians, if I felt disposed to go with them he would give up all claim to me. A thought flashed upon me, that possibly this might be the tribe of Great Medicine, and I begged to see them. My request was granted, and the first glance showed me I was right in my conjectures; and, uttering a joyful cry, I rushed outside of the gate, to where they were assembled before the walls of the hacienda.

“Frank, it is impossible for me to describe my feelings then. Life, liberty, everything joyous, seemed bursting upon me at once, and my brain grew dizzy with the exhilarating, intoxicating thoughts. I hugged the first Indian I met; I danced, capered around, shouted, laughed, cried—in short, did everything extravagant to give my overpowering feelings vent. For an hour or two I was insane with joy, and my reasoning powers as bewildered as those of a lunatic.

“At last I began to grow calm; and then I went around to each of my old friends and shook them by the hand, thanked them with tearful eyes and trembling voice for my deliverance, and received their congratulations and caresses in return.

“But where was Prairie Flower? As yet I had not seen her. I made the inquiry, but could get no direct answer. Some shook their heads, others said she was not here, and others again that she was away. Finding none would answer me, I concluded they had a sufficient reason for their evasion and dropped the subject.

“When everything had been satisfactorily arranged, and I had become reasonably sobered down, we all set off toward the north. A horse had been provided for me, and all were mounted—the females, of whom there were several, mostly on mules.

“Some three miles from the hacienda we reached a heavy wood. Entering this about a mile, we made a halt by a spring. While watering the animals, I heard a distant rustling of the bushes and the tramp of more horses. Presently an airy figure, gaily attired, and mounted on a coal black Indian pony, burst through a dense copse near me, followed by five dusky maidens, and rode swiftly up to where I was standing by my steed.

“ ‘Prairie Flower!’ I exclaimed; and the next moment she was on her feet and her hand clasped in mine.

“ Oh, the emotions of that moment! Time seemed to have turned his wheel backward, and years of toil and grief and fatigue were forgotten. Passions, which had slumbered, or been half-obliterated by other events, were again awakened and brought forth from their secret recesses; and I saw her as I had seen her three years before, and felt all I had then felt, but in a two-fold sense.

“ As for Prairie Flower, she was pale and exceedingly agitated. She grasped my hand nervously, gave one searching glance at my features, and burst into tears—but did not speak. Then she sprung away from me a few paces, dashed the tears from her eyes, and returning with a bound, asked me a dozen questions in a breath: ‘How I had been? where I had been? if I were well? if I were glad to get my liberty?’ and so on; and wound up by adding that she was rejoiced to see me, and hoped I should be more fortunate hereafter.

“ Throughout our first brief interview, her manner was wild and her language almost incoherent—which, so different from anything I had seen, surprised and alarmed me. She would ask a question; and then, without waiting for an answer, ask another and another, or make some remark altogether irrelevant. At last, with a hope that I would now be happy, she informed me that she could see me no more that day; and before I had time to reply, she had darted away, sprung into her saddle and was off—followed by all the females of the tribe and some half a dozen of the other sex.

“ This proceeding perplexed me not a little. I asked several the meaning of it; but they only shook their heads, and I was left to ponder it in secret.

“ We pursued our way slowly toward the north; and I saw nothing of Prairie Flower, nor of those who had accompanied her, till about noon of the succeeding day, when she again joined us, with the rest of the tribe, among whom were some women and children I had not before seen, which led me to infer there had been two

camps, and this supposition was subsequently confirmed by Prairie Flower herself.

"My second meeting with Prairie Flower was very different from the first. She was calm, constrained, and I fancied cold; though somehow I was led to think this rather forced than natural. She was polite, civil, and agreeable; but all that passionate enthusiasm of the preceding day was gone. She did not speak with freedom, and her words seemed studied, and her sentences regulated by previous thought. In fact, she seemed to have relapsed into the same state as when we first were guests of herself and tribe. There was either something very mysterious about this, or else it sprung from one natural cause—and my vanity, it may be, led me to infer the latter. If she loved me, her actions were easily accounted for; if she did not care for me, why had she taken so much pains, as her own lips revealed, to search me out?

"In the course of the conversation which ensued, she narrated how she had met you—under what circumstances—and how, urged on by a sense of duty, she had at once set off with her tribe in the hope of learning something more of my fate. Fortune favored her; for while on her way south, she met with an old mountaineer, who gave her tidings of a cheering nature. As her adventures have been so much like your own, Frank, I shall not enter into detail. Enough that she was successful in finding me, and that I am here.

"Day after day, as we traveled north, I had more or less interviews with Prairie Flower; but though she ever treated me with respect and politeness, she always studied to avoid familiarity.

"At last we reached the present spot, where the tribe have encamped for a few weeks, or until the fishers and hunters shall have laid in a supply of provisions, when they intend proceeding further north. From Prairie Flower having seen you where she did, I inferred you had gone home, and every day have been intending to follow. But somehow, when the time has come to start, I have again put it off for another twenty-four hours; and thus have been delaying, day after day, for what purpose I hardly know myself. I believe I have been held here by

some charm too powerful to break, and now that you have come I am glad of it."

"And that charm," said I, as my friend concluded with a sigh, "is Prairie Flower."

"It may be," he answered, musingly. "She is so strange—I do not know what to make of her. She is not an Indian—I feel certain of that; but as to who she is I am as unenlightened as ever. Do you really think she loves me, Frank?" he asked suddenly, rousing himself and fastening his eyes earnestly upon mine.

"How can I answer?" I said, evasively. "But I know of one that does, Charles."

"You mean the Unknown—or rather, Eva Mortimer?" he rejoined, musingly.

"I do. I have already delivered her message, sufficient to assure you of the fact; and she is certainly one worthy of being loved."

"It may be," he sighed, "and there *was* a time, Frank, when such intelligence would have made me happy. But now—he paused, shook his head, and mused a moment—now it is not so. When I first saw Eva, I had never seen Prairie Flower; and ere the germ of a first passion had been brought to maturity, the tree was transplanted to another soil, and the sun of another clime, although it did not change its nature, ripened it in another light. Or, to drop all metaphor," he added, "Eva was the first to arouse in me a latent passion, which doubtless a proper intercourse would have warmed to a mutual attachment; but ere this was consummated—ere I even knew who she was—without a hope of ever seeing her again—I departed, and have never beheld her since. She touched some secret chord in my breast, and I dwelt on her memory for a time, and loved her as an unapproachable ideal rather than as an approachable substance. I loved her, or fancied I did, rather that I had nothing else on which to place my affections, than for any substantial cause. In another I afterward found a resemblance which arrested my attention and changed the current of my thoughts. The singular manner in which we were thrown together; our daily interviews; my gratitude to her as the preserver of my life and

yours ; her generosity ; in short, the concentration in her of every noble quality and the absence of all others, gradually drew me to Prairie Flower ; and ere I was aware of it myself, I found her presence necessary to my happiness. At last we parted, as you know how, and I strove to forget her ; but, Frank, though I mentioned her not to you, I now tell you that I strove a long time in vain. By day and by night, in a greater or less degree, did she occupy my thoughts ; and it was only when misfortunes fell upon me that her image gradually gave place to more trying thoughts. But our second meeting—an additional debt of gratitude for deliverance from slavery—has done the work ; and I now feel I can love none but Prairie Flower."

"Then you are really in love, Charles ?"

"I am ; and I fear hopelessly so."

"I fear so too," sighed I. "But where is Prairie Flower ? I must see and thank her from my heart."

As I spoke, the subject of our conversation glided into the rude lodge and stood before me.

CHAPTER XLII.

A STRANGE SURMISE.

"RAIRIE FLOWER ! my dearest friend !" I exclaimed, springing to my feet and clasping her extended hands in both of mine : "Prairie Flower, this is a happy meeting—most happy !"

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Leighton," she said, with something like a sigh ; "very, very glad !" and she closed in a tremulous tone, while her dark eyes filled with tears.

Oh, how beautiful she looked, as we stood face to face, her hands clasped in mine ! Never had she appeared

more lovely. Since our first meeting, time had ripened her to full maturity ; and though her sweet countenance was pale and sad, and though something like care and thought could be traced thereon, yet it was so mellowed, so blended with something lofty and noble, that it added a peculiar charm to her appearance which mere physical beauty could not sustain. It was a something that, while you admired, awakened your sympathy, and drew you to her, as toward one you felt it your duty and delight to soothe, cherish, and protect. As I gazed upon her a moment in silence, I became forcibly struck with the resemblance she bore to Eva Mortimer. She was a shade darker, perhaps ; but this might be owing to her life in the mountains, and constant exposure to the free, bracing air. There was the same mold of feature, and, in her now sad and thoughtful expression, a marked resemblance to that I had seen on the countenance of Eva as she bade me farewell. A sudden thought sent a hot flush over me, and involuntarily I took a step backward and scrutinized her again. Good heavens ! could it be possible ? No ! no ! it was too visionary. "And yet why too visionary ?" I said, half aloud. As strange things had happened. Eva had a sister—a twin sister—who was lost at an infantile age—who had been stolen away. There was no existing proof—or at least none to my knowledge—that that sister was dead : no one knew what had become of her. Here was a being of her own age apparently, and of a marked resemblance. Her history she would never touch upon—perhaps did not know. Might Prairie Flower not be that twin sister ? The thought, the suspicion, was wild and romantic—but what argument was there against it ? The ways of Providence are strange, but not in all cases past finding out.

"It must be so !" I ejaculated, completely absorbed with my speculations, and forgetful of everything around me.

I was aroused from my reverie by the voices of both my friend and Prairie Flower.

"What is the matter, Frank ?" cried Huntly, grasping my arm, shaking me, and gazing upon me with a look of

alarm. "Speak to me! speak! that I may know you have your reason!"

"Are you ill, sir?" joined in Prairie Flower, with a startled look. "I fear you are ill! Fatigue has overcome him," she added to Huntly. "Better get him to lie down on the mat, while I run for assistance."

"Stay! stay!" I exclaimed, as she turned to depart. "I am not ill. I was only—I beg your pardon—did I act strangely?"

"As I never saw you before," replied Huntly. "You stared wildly at Prairie Flower, and spoke incoherently. Tell me! are you in your senses!"

"Most certainly I am. I was only thinking of—of——"

"Of what, pray?"

"Prairie Flower, speak!" I exclaimed, addressing her, as she stood near the entrance, uncertain whether to depart or not: "Speak! what do you know of your history?"

"My history?" she repeated in surprise. "Have I not forbidden you——"

"Never mind now! I have important reasons for asking."

She colored to the eyes, and seemed greatly embarrassed.

"What reasons can you have," she rejoined, "for asking this, in this wild manner? You surprise and alarm me!"

"A resemblance," I replied, "a strong resemblance you bear to another. Fear not to tell me and my friend what you know; and we promise, if necessary, to keep your secret inviolate."

"Ay, do, Prairie Flower!" urged Huntly, vehemently, who now comprehended the whole matter. "Speak, dear Prairie Flower, without reserve! Speak, I pray you! for much depends upon your answer."

"Are you both mad?" she said, looking from one to the other, as if doubting our sanity.

"No! no!" I returned; "we are not mad, but in our sober senses. A weighty reason, which my friend did not at first, but now understands, and all important to you as well as ourselves and others, induces the inquiry."

Come, sweet Prairie Flower! will you not grant our request?"

She hung down her head, tapped the earth with her foot, and seemed confused and agitated. I approached and gently took her hand, and again in a soothing voice entreated her to tell us all she knew—reiterating my promise, that, if necessary, it should never pass to other ears.

"Say, sweet being! are you not of our race?—are you not a pale-face?"

For some time she did not reply, during which she seemed struggling to master her emotions. At length a half inaudible, "I am," escaped her lips.

"I thought so—I could almost have sworn it!" I returned, triumphantly. "And your parents, Prairie Flower?"

She burst into tears, and hid her face in her hands.

"Nay, sweet Prairie Flower, be calm!" I added. "Do not let this affect you so seriously. I do not seek to pry into your private affairs, only so far as I fancy the knowledge imparted may benefit yourself. Tell me—did you or do you know your parents?"

She shook her head and sobbed aloud.

"Believe me, gentle maiden, nothing is further from my design than to wound your feelings or recall painful associations. Do you know how you came among the Indians?"

"Something I know," she answered.

"Will you tell us what you know?"

"As you seem so anxious," she said, making an effort to dry her tears, "I will, on condition I gain the consent of Cha-cha-chee-kee-ho-bah."

"And what has he to do with it?"

"I have promised to reveal nothing without his consent. And now I think of it," she quickly added, "perhaps I have done wrong in saying what I have."

"Give yourself no uneasiness, Prairie Flower, for even he could attach no blame to what you have said. But how came you to promise him this?"

"He exacted it of me as my guardian."

"Indeed! Then he must know your history?"

“He knows more of it than I do.”

“Then I must see him at once. Pray, conduct me to him !”

“Nay, sir,” she answered, “it were useless. He would tell you nothing. He is old, and singular, and would look upon you as an intruder. I will see him, and see what can be done. He loves me, and I have more influence over him than any other of the tribe. If he refuses to tell me, no earthly power can open his lips, and the secret will go down to the grave with him. But now let me hear something of yourself, and how we all came to meet again in a manner so singular.”

“One question more, Prairie Flower !”

“Nay, no more. I will answer nothing further till I have consulted the Old-Man-of-the-Mountains.”

“Be it so, then,” I answered ; and the conversation changed to matters connected with my present adventure.

We were still engaged in recalling past events, when an Indian maiden hurriedly entered the lodge, and said something in her own language to Prairie Flower.

“Indeed !” she exclaimed, starting and turning deadly pale. “Gentlemen, excuse me !” and she hastened from the cot.

“What can be the meaning of this ?” said Huntly.

“Some startling news, I judge. Perhaps some one has been taken ill and sent for her.”

“And so, Frank,” returned Huntly the next moment, “you really think Prairie Flower and Eva sisters ?”

“There is so strong a resemblance, my friend, that, until I have proof to the contrary, I can hardly believe otherwise.”

“Strange !” he rejoined, musingly : “Strange ! very strange ! Yet since you have told me something of the history of the Mortimers, I must say the matter looks possible, not to say probable.”

“At all events,” I returned, “there is mystery somewhere, and I shall not rest till it be sifted to the bottom. I hope she may prevail upon the old man to allow her to tell what she knows, even if he add nothing himself.”

"And should it turn out as we suspect, Frank!" said Huntly, with great energy, grasping my arm as he spoke.

"Well?"

"You know I—that is——"

"I understand. You would have her the closest of kin—eh! Charles?"

"Say no more. I see you understand me. But then, I——"

"Well, say on."

"I—that is—you—perhaps she—she does not fancy me?"

"What! do you doubt?"

"Why, no—yes—I—I cannot say I doubt—but—but she is so strange, Frank! I would give the world to have her talk to me with the freedom she does to you."

"And if you really love her, Charles, you should give the world to have everything exactly the reverse; in other words, exactly as it is."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, simply, that she does not love me."

"Are you sure of this, Frank?" and Huntly fastened his eyes intently upon mine, as if to read my soul.

"As sure as that the sun shines at noon-day."

"And you think she—she——"

"Loves another."

Huntly turned deadly pale.

"Name him, Frank?" he gasped.

"Charles Huntly."

"Indeed!" he exclaimed, with a rapid change of countenance. "You think this?"

"I know it."

He took a step backward and looked at me hard for a moment—during which his color came and went rapidly, and his breathing became audible—and then he said, impressively:

"Frank, do not jest with me! To me this matter is of the gravest importance."

"I do not jest, Charles; I know your feelings, and you may rest assured I would be the last to jest with them."

"And you say she loves me?"

"I do."

He grasped my hand, the tears sprung into his eyes, and his voice trembled as he rejoined:

"Frank, I thank you for these words! I am suffering under deep affliction—my life is clouded—but, if this be true, there is still sunshine—still an oasis in the desert—still something to look forward to."

"My words are true, my friend, if that is any consolation."

"And how have you discovered this so suddenly?"

"I have not. I have known it all along."

"Indeed! you never told me so before."

"True, and for good reasons."

"What reasons, I pray?"

"I did not wish to encourage an attachment which may even yet prove hopeless."

"What mean you?"

"As I told you once before: Prairie Flower may love—nay, does love, mark that!—but may never marry—nay, may even reject the suit of him she idolizes."

"For what cause?"

"That she is already wedded to her tribe."

"But should she prove to be what we suspect?"

"That *may* alter the case with her; and on the strength of that supposition, and that you have been so mysteriously brought together, and that I find your affections so firmly placed upon her, have I ventured to tell you what I have long known. But remember, Charles, I warn you not to be too sanguine in your expectations!"

"Well," answered my friend, "I will hope for the best. It is all very singular!" he added, relapsing into a musing mood.

"I suppose we had better not start for Oregon to-day?" said I, playfully.

"No, not to-day!" he replied; "not to-day! To-morrow, perhaps."

"Or peradventure the day following!"

"Ay, peradventure."

At this moment Teddy, Pierre and Black George

appeared at the door to pay their respects to my friend, and I quitted the lodge, bidding them pass in.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ILLNESS AND DEATH OF GREAT MEDICINE.



S yet I had not exchanged a word with any of the tribe but Prairie Flower ; and as I left the cot, I turned toward a crowd, which was huddled together near the center of the temporary village, their eyes all fixed in a certain direction. I knew by this, and the abrupt departure of Prairie Flower, that something unusual had occurred ; and hastening forward, I soon reached them, and, to my surprise, found most of them in tears, and the others looking very solemn.

“What has happened, my friends?” inquired I.

On hearing my voice, those nearest to me turned round and extended their hands in silence. They then separated, so as to allow me a passage through ; and, as I moved along, I shook a hand of each on either side. They appeared glad to see me, but, at the same time, very sad, from some untoward circumstance, of which I felt anxious to be informed.

When I had concluded, I turned to an intelligent youth, and inquired the cause of each and all looking so serious.

He silently pointed his finger to the center lodge, and, after a solemn pause, uttered :

“Great Medicine.”

“Sick ?”

He nodded his head.

This, then, accounted for the agitation of Prairie Flower ; and after what had passed between us regarding her history, it may readily be inferred I felt no little

anxiety to ascertain to what extent the old man was indisposed, and whether his case was considered immediately dangerous. He was very old, I knew, and in all probability would not long survive. Should he die without revealing to Prairie Flower her history, all dependence of proof from her would be cut off, and it would doubtless be a very difficult, if not an impossible, endeavor, to identify her with the lost daughter of Madame Mortimer. On this account, as well as for old acquaintance sake, I was very anxious to enter the lodge—at the door of which were standing several females, weeping. I made a step forward for this purpose, when an Indian touched me on the shoulder and shook his head, as a sign that I must go no nearer.

“I have most important business with the sick man,” I said. “Can I not be permitted to see him?”

He again shook his head,

“But this matter is urgent!”

“No one must see him,” he answered, “but such as he desires to see.”

“Then let me see Prairie Flower.”

“She must not now be called. We wait her appearance.”

“Will she soon be here?”

“I cannot say.”

There was nothing to do, therefore, but to wait as patiently as I could. What troubled me the most, was the fear that the old man might die suddenly, and Prairie Flower, in her agitation, neglect to question him till too late.

For an hour I paced to and fro, in a very uneasy mood, revolving these things in my mind, when Prairie Flower made her appearance outside of the lodge, where she was instantly surrounded by those nearest in waiting, all eager for her intelligence.

Having spoken a few words with her, they all moved slowly away, with sorrowful looks, and Prairie Flower approached to where I was standing.

The Indians, though as anxious as myself to gain her tidings, moved not from their places, but waited in respectful silence for her to open the conversation.

I, however, not being bred in the same school with them, could not exercise the same patience ; and, taking a few steps forward, I said :

"Great Medicine is ill, Prairie Flower?"

"He is," she answered, in a tremulous voice.

"Very ill? dangerously ill?" I inquired.

"I fear he is."

The Indians behind me, on hearing this, uttered several deep groans, but said not a word.

"Can he survive, Prairie Flower?"

"I think not," she answered, mournfully shaking her head.

"Any particular disease?"

"Old age and debility. He is very old, and has not been well for some time. A few minutes before I was called, he was taken very ill. I fear his time to go is at hand. Friends," she added, addressing her tribe, "you are about to lose one you love and reverence. Let us commend his soul to the Great Spirit;" and thereupon each and all kneeled upon the earth in prayer.

When this was over, I turned to Prairie Flower again.

"Pardon me, fair being," I said, "at this solemn time, for intruding worldly thoughts upon your attention! But the Old-man-of-the-Mountains is about to depart, in all probability, to join his fathers and friends in another state. You think he holds the key to your history. If you have not already, would it not be well for you to bid him unlock the memories of the past, so far as relates to yourself?"

"True," she answered, with a start ; "I had forgotten that. I fear it is too late ; for already his voice falters, and he seems standing midway between time and eternity, and slowly receding toward the invisible land of spirits."

"Fly!" I urged : "fly, Prairie Flower! and do your best, ere all is over!"

"I will," she said ; and at once hastened back to the lodge.

For another hour I paced to and fro impatiently, ever

and anon turning my eyes upon the hut where the old man was breathing his last.

At length Prairie Flower reappeared, and, with her, three Indian maidens, all weeping and seeming very much dejected.

On leaving the lodge, each went separate ways through the village, Prairie Flower approaching me direct.

"To prayer!" she said, addressing her friends, who still remained as she had left them.

All again kneeled as before. When they rose to their feet, I addressed her:

"What news, Prairie Flower?"

"He is sinking very fast," she answered, sadly.

"Did you gain any information?"

"No! I addressed him on the subject, but he only looked at me vaguely, and did not seem to comprehend what I said."

"Alas! I fear it is too late, Prairie Flower!"

"I fear so," she rejoined. "But he may revive a little; and if he do, I will question him again."

With this she returned to the lodge of the dying man, while I proceeded to join my friend, and inform him of what had occurred.

I found Huntly as I had left him, in company with our companions, all engaged in an animated conversation.

"Well," he said, as I entered, "what news, Frank? Something has happened, I know by your sober looks."

I proceeded to detail what had transpired, and the fears I entertained.

"This is unfortunate," he said, when I had done; "most unfortunate."

The sun was some half an hour above the hills, when Prairie Flower again joined us in haste. Pierre, Teddy and Black George had left some time before, so that no one was in the cot but myself and friend, and we were so deeply engaged in discussing the various matters which had transpired, as not to be aware of her close proximity till she spoke:

"Where is this lady," she asked, "whom I resemble?"

"I left her in Oregon City," I replied.

"That is far away," she rejoined, musingly.

"But what success, Prairie Flower?"

"Better than I expected."

"Indeed! You give us joy."

"As I observed he might do, when I quitted you," she answered, "the old man again revived, when I immediately put the question as to what he knew of my history. He seemed much surprised, and inquired my reasons for asking. I hurriedly informed him of your conjectures. He listened attentively, and seemed ill at ease. He had promised, he said in reply, never to divulge, during his natural life, who I was, nor anything connected with my earliest years."

"Ha! then he knows your history himself?"

"Nay, do not interrupt me."

"I crave your pardon! Go on."

"Yes," continued Prairie Flower, "he said he knew much concerning me, but did not know all; that something had whispered him this information might be valuable to me at some future time; and that he had recorded it on a roll of parchment, which he had purchased of a trader for the purpose. This parchment, he said, was concealed under a stone, in a certain place, which none but such as to whom he might reveal the secret would ever be able to find. He further said, that if in truth I had a sister and mother living, I had better perhaps seek them out; and, should they recognize and claim me, I could then do as I should think proper, either cling to them or my tribe; that although I had been reared for the most part among Indians, and had adopted their habits and customs, still I was not of their race, not of their blood, and he could therefore see nothing unnatural or improper in my desiring to form acquaintance with my own kin. But, he added, lest I should meet with disappointment—in my kin, or those I supposed to be such, not claiming me on what I and they might know—he thought it better that I should remain ignorant of myself until I had seen them face to face;

when, should all turn out as I desired, it would be time enough to produce proof; and that if I would promise to go in quest of them before perusing, or allowing another to peruse, the parchment in question, he would make its locality known."

"What a singular request!" said I.

"True," replied Prairie Flower; "but, as I have said before, Great Medicine is a very singular being, and an enigma to all."

"And did you agree to his proposition?"

"I did, though somewhat reluctantly. But I knew, if I did not, that the secret would die with him, and of this I could not bear to think."

"And so he told you all?"

"He did."

"And where is the parchment concealed?"

"Nay," she answered, shaking her head, "I do not know as I am at liberty to tell."

"I beg your pardon, Prairie Flower! I certainly had no right to question. But you will accompany us to Oregon City?"

"That is what I came to speak about," she replied, timidly. "You really think your conjectures are right?"

"We do," answered Huntly. "Everything tends to convince us so. At first, what was only a vague suspicion with us, has since grown almost to a certainty. Come, go with us, sweet Prairie Flower! Say you will go, and I shall be happy."

Prairie Flower changed color as Huntly spoke, and turned aside her head.

"And you will allow me a few companions?" she timidly inquired.

"As many as you please," returned Huntly, "so you will consent to go."

"But when do you start?"

"We will wait your time."

"My duty," she said, solemnly, "is henceforth by the side of Cha-cha-chee-kee-ho-bah, till he take his departure to the land of eternal rest—then to follow his remains to the grave—which done, I shall soon be ready to

join you. Adieu, for the present ! I must return to him now."

Saying which, she quitted the lodge.

"At last !" said Huntly, turning to me : "At last, Frank, I have hope ! Let us forth and take the evening air—for strange thoughts are crowding my breast."

Arm in arm we strolled through the little village, where the solemn faces of all we met bespoke the gloom of mourning for one universally beloved, and took our way down to the little streamlet, which, all unconscious of mortal change, ran murmuring on as it had done perchance for ages. All nature reposed in her most charming beauty of quietude. The sun was just beginning to sink behind the lofty mountains to the westward, and the last flood-light of day made golden the tiny waves of the water, and began to hasten the long shadows, precursors of diurnal night, and that night of death which knows no waking. The very air seemed solemn, it was so still. Scarce a breath moved, and the leaflets hung down their heads as if in sorrow. The feathered warblers, which had made music all day, were winding up their tunes with what seemed a melancholy cadence. A few night-watchers had just begun to give each other calls in timid tones, as if half afraid their voices were trespassing upon a scene too sacred. It was just calm enough, and mild enough, and lovely enough, and solemn enough, to awaken meditative thought ; that thought in which all the unutterable poetry of our nature becomes infused ; when the outward sense bids the inner tongue speak to us in language which the enraptured soul only comprehends ; when we feel a melancholy happiness, and a desire to steal away from everything living, and in solitude commune with ourselves and our God ; when the natural voice jars discordantly with the finer and more elevated tones of our being, proceeding from the spirit-harp, touched by the unseen hand of the All-pervading Deity ; when, in short, we feel drawn by an unexplainable sympathy to a lonely meditation on things high and holy, beyond the matter-of-fact events of every-day experience.

Did you never feel thus, reader ? Did you never steal

away from your daily cares, your business, your friends—from everything common and evanescent—to hold a quiet communion with your nobler thoughts?—and then trace those thoughts, as it were, to their primeval source—the eternal fount of the Great All-Good? And are not such sweet thoughts, and sweet moments of happy rest, in a life more or less filled with turmoil and pain? For myself, I answer yes; for I look upon them as foretastings of a state of blissful and eternal beatitude, when the changing circumstances of this life shall trouble us no more forever.

Thus I felt, and thus my friend, on the present occasion. Deep thought with both was too busy for words, and we gained the rivulet in silence. Some fifty yards above us was a large, flat rock, overhanging the gurgling waters. Toward this Huntly silently pointed; and obeying the gesture, I accompanied him thither. Seated at length upon it, our eyes simultaneously became fixed upon the rapid current laving its base, and our ears drank in its music, while the sunlight gradually departed from the stream, the deepening shadows of night stretched over us, growing more and more somber, and the stars here and there began to peep out in the heavens, and shine brighter and more bright, till the firmament above appeared blazoned with thousands on thousands of shining worlds, the armorial bearings of the Great Omnipotent. Still we sat in silence—now soaring in thought to another existence—now dwelling upon the wonders of nature as a complicated whole, or equally complicated, inexplicable part—and anon reviewing the past, touching upon the present, and leaping forward in imagination to the future—that future, to the young, of golden hopes and bright anticipations, destined for the most part never to be realized. Thus we mutely sat, for an hour or more, when Huntly broke the silence.

“Frank,” he said, “what a charm, what a solemn charm, there seems in everything to-night! I have been musing, as it were, upon everything. I have been back to my boyhood days, when I was wild, giddy, reckless, and frolicsome; when I had no thought beyond the sport of the hour, and no ambition but to make a jest of my

fellow beings. I have traced up our youthful sports (for you and I were almost one, you know,) to that sudden resolve which parted me for the last time from my beloved father."

Here his voice faltered to a pause, and for some moments he remained silent, with his face bowed upon his hands. Then raising his head, he dashed away a few tears, and resumed :

"I have recalled event after event to the present time ; and I find, in my reckless career, that I have much, too much, to regret. But I believe in an overruling, mysterious Power, and that there has been a purpose in all beyond my own simple inclinations. Adversity, I feel, has been for the best, by working in me a great change. Yes, Frank, I am a changed being. From boyhood I have passed to manhood, and from the idle follies of youth, to the wiser and more sober thoughts of maturer age. Once I was all for adventure and change—but now the case is different. I have seen enough, and am satisfied. Let me once more be comfortably situated, with a home and friends, means to gain an honest living, and, Frank, one, one sweet being, to cheer me with her smiles over the otherwise toilsome path of life, and I shall rest content."

"A great change this, in Charles Huntly, most certainly," I said ; "a great change indeed ! But perhaps no more than in myself ; for I, too, am tired of adventure, and ardently long for those very joys, (joys now, Charles, though once it was not so,) of which you speak."

"Hark !" exclaimed my friend at this moment. "What sound is that?"

A long, loud, mournful wail came borne upon the air.

"Alas !" said I ; "it speaks of a soul departed !"

"Let us return," said Huntly, with a sigh ; and forthwith we set out for the village.

On our way thither, we several times heard the same melancholy sound ; and as we entered the precincts of the little settlement, we beheld somber figures moving to and fro, bearing lighted torches. As we drew near the

center lodge, I discovered Prairie Flower, in company with several of her own sex, moaning with grief.

She espied us as we came up, and, separating from her companions, approached and extended a hand to each.

"Alas, my friends," she sighed, "I need your sympathy! He who has been to me a guardian, a father, is now no more."

Her voice faltered as she spoke, and, withdrawing her hands from ours, she covered her eyes and wept aloud.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE LEGACY OF PRAIRIE FLOWER.



THE second day from his death, was the one set apart for the burial of the Old-Man-of-the-Mountains. Each of my party, and every one of the tribe, was present, and the funeral rite was conducted in the solemn manner described in a former chapter. As it had been the province of the deceased to enact a peculiar part on all similar occasions, and as this constituted one of their forms of worship, it became necessary for the tribe to select one of their number to fill his place. The one chosen for the office, which he was to hold till death, was an old, white-haired Indian, of benevolent aspect, who at once entered upon his duties, and thenceforth took the title of "Great Medicine."

A grave was dug in the valley by the little stream; and here the deceased was buried, with all the mournful honors befitting his station. Great were the lamentations, and many the tears shed, as his body was lowered to his last, long, narrow home—the house appointed for all living! When his remains had been covered from

the sight of all, and the "Last Dirge" had been chanted, several Indian maidens brought and strewed flowers over the damp earth ; and then repeating, "Sleep in peace, beloved !" the whole tribe took a solemn leave of the spot, and slowly and sadly retraced their steps to the village.

An hour or two later, Prairie Flower sought me out and said :

"I suppose, my friend, you are anxious to be on your way?"

"At your earliest convenience," I replied.

"I do not wish to detain you," she rejoined ; "but if you can delay another day, it will greatly oblige me, as I have much to attend to ere I depart."

"A day, either way, will make but little difference," said I ; "and, moreover, we could not expect you to leave sooner, after what has occurred."

"Thank you," she replied. "I will hasten all my arrangements, and at sunrise to-morrow will be yours to command ;" and she left me to begin her preparations.

In the course of the day, Prairie Flower informed the tribe of what had transpired relative to herself, and also of her present design. The younger members, who had always looked upon her as one of themselves, were much surprised, and all were very sad at the thought of parting with one so dear to them. They could not but admit, under the circumstances, it was her duty to go ; but they made her promise, in case events should turn up inducing her to withdraw from them altogether, that she would at least pay them one more visit ere saying the final farewell. She then made choice of three young men and two maidens to be her companions, and selected five noble steeds for them to ride, reserving the little pony for herself.

At daylight on the following morning the whole village was astir ; and having broken our fast, the horses were caught and saddled, and, ere the sun was half an hour above the hills, all were in readiness to start.

The parting scene between Prairie Flower and her friends was very affecting. She embraced all of her own sex—kissed the children over and over again—shook the

young men and aged by the hand—and, amid tears at losing her, and earnest prayers for her safety and happiness, sprung upon her pony and dashed away, too much affected to witness the separation between those who remained and those selected to accompany her. The latter now took leave, one by one; and though much feeling was displayed on both sides, yet it was very different from the farewell of Prairie Flower.

“My friends,” said Huntly, when it came our turn to depart, “for your kindness to me I feel very, very grateful—but at present, the only return in my power to make is thanks. Should I ever have an opportunity to do more, you shall find that your labors in my behalf have not been unworthily bestowed. Farewell! If we meet not again on earth, I trust we may in a better state.”

Each of our party next proceeded to shake hands with each of the tribe; and as soon as this was over, we sprung upon our horses, and, dashing away, soon joined those in advance.

I must now pass rapidly over our journey, as but little occurred on the way of interest to the general reader.

Our provisions were supplied by our trusty rifles—we sometimes killing a bear, a deer, and once or twice a buffalo.

Entering the beautiful South Park, a kind of second Eden, we pushed forward, and on the second day reached the head waters of the South Fork of Platte, down which stream we continued to St. Vrain's Fort, where we all arrived without accident.

Here I took leave of Pierre and Black George, paying them liberally for their assistance, and pursued our journey toward the Black Hills, to the very spot where I had first been introduced to the Mysterious Tribe, and where, as I learned from Prairie Flower, they intended making their winter quarters.

On our way thither, Prairie Flower threw off much of that reserve which she had hitherto exercised toward Huntly; and not unfrequently they rode on together for miles, engaged in earnest conversation. The effect of

this upon my friend was very gratifying to me ; it seemed to divert his thoughts from more painful subjects ; and I saw with pleasure that his pale, careworn features gradually resumed their wonted appearance, and his eye, especially, its former luster. Still he was sad at times—very sad—and then I knew his thoughts were dwelling upon the loss of his father, and the afflictions of his mother and sister. He was naturally but little given to despondency ; and when in company with myself or another, ever strove to be cheerful, that he might not cause us the pain of sympathy.

Sometimes I held long, private conversations with Prairie Flower ; and then she would ask me over and over again about her supposed sister and mother—whether I thought they would be glad to own her—and more than once made me recount what little I knew of their history. This was a theme of which she seemed never to tire, and oftentimes would be affected to tears. Then she would tell me how she had mused over herself, and wondered who she was—whether she had a mother living—and if so, whether that mother ever thought of her. Sometimes she had fancied herself ignobly born—that she had been cast off in infancy—and then she had gone away by herself and wept bitter tears, and had prayed ardently that she might be resigned to her fate. She loved the Indians—among whom, at an early age, her lot had been cast—to her they were as brothers and sisters ; but still the knowledge that she was not of their race—a secret yearning for the fond look and tender tone of a mother—had troubled her sorely ; and nothing but the consolation of religion, and the hope of at last meeting her relatives in a better world, had supported her through her lonely trials.

Until I heard this from the lips of Prairie Flower, I had no idea that such was the case, and had believed her contented and happy in the position where Providence had placed her, as had all who knew her. But they, as well as I, had overlooked, that where mystery clouds the birth of an individual, the thought of this to a sensitive, intelligent mind—his or her speculations upon it—the want of, the yearning for, more knowledge—must at

times render such, no matter what the outward seeming, very unhappy. It was this very thing, perhaps, which had made Prairie Flower so distant toward my friend, whom she loved, as I knew, with a passion pure and holy. She had thought herself unfit to be his companion, and had nobly struggled to undo what nature had done; and oh! what a hopeless and painful struggle it had been!—what an iron resolution it had required to carry it out!—and how many sleepless nights and miserable days it must have cost her!

At last we reached the village, to which, some three years before, I had been borne from the field of battle in an unconscious state. What singular associations the sight of it revived! and how mournful its present aspect! It was deserted, and silent; and though most of its rude tenements were still standing, yet their half dilapidated appearance, and the general air of long desertion and decay everywhere visible, brought to mind Goldsmith's unrivaled and beautiful poem of the "Deserted Village." We rode through the little town in silence, noting each thing as we passed—and when we had got beyond it, Prairie Flower turned, gazed back, sighed deeply, wiped a few tears from her eyes, and then urged her little pony forward at a rapid pace.

A ride of half a mile brought us to a huge old tree, with a hollow trunk, when Prairie Flower came to a halt and said:

"My friends, this is the spot designated by Great Medicine as the one where I should find a treasure to me more valuable than a mine of gold. Beneath that stone lies all or nothing. Oh! how I tremble, lest it prove the latter! Heaven grant I find what I seek!"

"Amen to that!" responded I; and the whole party dismounted.

Leading the way, Prairie Flower passed the tree a few feet, and rested her delicate foot upon a stone of singular appearance.

"Here!" she almost gasped, while her features grew deadly pale with excitement, and her frame shook nervously: "Here!" and she pointed down with her finger, but could say no more.

Forming a circle around the stone, we all gazed upon it a moment in silence, and then addressing Huntly :

"Come, my friend," I said, "let us raise it."

Stooping down, we applied all our strength to it in vain.

"It seems bedded in the earth by nature," said Huntly.

"Oh, no! say not that!" cried Prairie Flower, in alarm. "Say not that, I beg of you! This is the spot described to me by the Old-Man-of-the-Mountains. I have thought of it by day—dreamed of it by night. I here have rested hopes of which you little think. Hopes, whose realization may render me the most happy, as disappointment would the most miserable, being on earth. If I have made a mistake, it is a fatal one. A mistake——But no! no! it must not, must not, be! Help, here, some of you!" she added, addressing the others. "Be quick! and do not keep me in this torturing suspense!"

She spoke hurriedly, almost frantically, and her manner was very wild. As she concluded, she clasped her hands and gazed down upon the rock with a look I shall never forget. It was the agonized concentration of hope and fear: as if, in truth, she feared herself about to lose the only friend she had on earth.

Instantly Teddy and one of the Indians laid hold with us, and our united efforts moved the stone from its foundation. All pressed forward, and eagerly gazed into the aperture. Nothing was there, apparently, but smooth, solid earth.

For a moment Prairie Flower stood stupefied with amazement and despair. Then, burying her face in her hands, she sunk down upon the earth, without uttering a syllable.

"Do not despair!" cried I; and, bending down, I felt the earth with my hand.

It was soft, as if it had once been removed. I hastily dug down a few inches, and my hand touched a solid substance. Brushing away the dirt rapidly, I discovered, to my unspeakable delight, a small, wooden box.

"It is here!" shouted I; "it is here!" and the next

moment I had torn it from the ground and stood triumphantly holding it aloft.

My words roused Prairie Flower, who started to her feet with a scream, caught the box from my hand, pressed it eagerly to her lips and heart, and then paced to and fro in an indescribable delirium of delight. At length she became more calm; and turning to the rest of us, who stood looking on in silence, she said, in one of her sweetest tones:

"My friends, you must excuse me!—but oh! you know not, cannot know, my feelings for the last five minutes!"

"We can at least imagine them," returned I; "and certainly there is no apology needed. We are only too happy in discovering the treasure."

"Ay, treasure indeed!" she exclaimed, holding the box from her, and gazing upon it with a singular expression. "Ha!" she added: "here is something written on the outside;" and, examining it a moment, she added: "It is in the language of the Mysterious Tribe, and, translated, reads, '*Seek lower!*'"

"That implies something still below," observed Huntly; and stooping down, he thrust his hand into the loose earth, and presently drew forth a lump of pure gold, weighing some three or four pounds.

Great was our astonishment on beholding this; but it was increased the next moment by my friend bringing up two more of nearly equal size and value. These lumps had no particular shape, and had the appearance of having been melted and poured upon a rough substance.

"This is strange!" remarked Prairie Flower, as we all stood examining them; "and where could Great Medicine have procured them? There is no gold in these mountains that I am aware of. And, by-the-way, this reminds me that Great Medicine was always well supplied with gold, though where it came from was always a mystery to the rest of the tribe. And see!" she added, giving one of the pieces a close scrutiny: "See! here is my Indian name, *Leni Leoti*, scratched upon it with some sharp instrument."

"And on this," said Huntly, holding up another.

"And on this," repeated I, turning over the third.

"They were intended for you, Prairie Flower," observed Huntly, addressing her; "and together form no mean gift."

"He was always kind to me, and I loved him," rejoined Prairie Flower, artlessly, her eyes filling with tears.

"But where could so much gold, in this rough state, have been obtained?" asked Huntly, turning to me.

A sudden thought flashed through my mind, and I turned to Prairie Flower.

"Was Great Medicine ever much abroad?"

"Never far from the tribe, since I first knew him," was her answer.

"But the tribe has been roving?"

"Yes, we have seldom spent a year at a time in one place."

"Were you ever in California?"

"One season we quartered on a beautiful oasis in the Great Desert, as we termed it."

"Ha! then there is some grounds for my conjecture;" and taking Huntly aside, I recalled to his mind the shiny sand we had there gathered, and added: "I think we were right in our surmises of its being gold!"

"True," he answered, with a start; "I remember now, though I had completely forgotten the circumstance."

"And so had I, till this revived it."

"Have you any of that sand with you, Frank?"

"I have not. Our subsequent perils drove the matter from my mind; and if any remained on my person when we arrived at Sutter's, it was thrown away with the tattered garments that contained it."

"Well, let it go!" rejoined Huntly, musingly; "let it go! There is gold there, without doubt—and some day it will doubtless be the means of great speculation."

"This being the case, my friend, suppose we make another tour, and ascertain for a certainty? If true, our fortune is made."

Huntly looked at me seriously for a moment, with a

very peculiar expression of countenance, and then rejoined, in a decisive tone :

“No, Frank ! not even a mine of gold would tempt me to encounter the perils of such a journey again. Suppose I were to prove successful and make a fortune—what then ? What is wealth, after all, that man should make himself a slave ? ’Tis here—’tis there—’tis gone. Look at my lamented father, for example ! One day he could count his thousands—the next he was a beggar—and the grave soon followed to cover a broken heart. Fortune is not happiness—therefore I’ll pay no court to the truant jade. Let those have wealth who crave it ; let them worship the golden Mammon ; for myself, let me be happy with little, and I ask no more. But, come ! I see Prairie Flower and the rest are waiting for us, and we must be on the move.”

Joining the others, we made further search ; but finding nothing new, we all mounted our horses and set forward—Prairie Flower in better spirits than I had ever seen her. Though in possession of the box, supposed to contain all she desired, yet she absolutely refused to open it, lest she might be tempted to an examination of its contents, and thus break her promise to the dying old man.

Summer had already passed, and the mortal stroke of old Autumn was even now beginning to be felt on the mountains. The trees, which had waved their green leaves as an accompaniment to the music of the forest choir, were already changing color, as if in dread of the steady, onward strides of their annual, but ever-conquering foe. The first process of decay had begun—but so beautifully begun, that one, as he gazed upon it, though it awakened a solemn, almost melancholy train of thought, could hardly wish it otherwise. As we ascended the mountains, higher and more high, the scene below us became enchanting in its variety. Far, far away, for miles upon miles, the eye roved over hill and plain ; while the soul, as it were, drank in the very essence of nature’s beauty. The atmosphere was cool and clear, and the sun brilliant, but not warm. In every direction there was something new for the eye to rest upon—something

new for the mind to ponder. I beheld distant mountains rising to the very skies—isolated, glistening and cold in their lonely grandeur—as one who has ventured to the topmost round of Ambition's ladder, and scorns in his elevation all meaner objects grovelling in the dust below. I beheld lovely valleys, as yet untouched by the destroyer, still bright in their summer garments, through which purled silvery streams—the former doomed ere long to put on the withered shreds of mourning, and the latter to cease their murmurs in the icy fetters of the advancing Winter-King. In short, I beheld hills, and dales, and forests, and rolling prairies, and rivers, and rivulets, all spread before me in picturesque succession, and all more or less variegated with the many-hued mantle of autumn. The scene was enchanting; and as Prairie Flower, who with my friend had also been silently surveying it, observed, with a sigh:

“Most melancholy beautiful.”

But lovely as was the view, I had but little time for contemplation; for the long journey before us, and the lateness of the season, required us to hasten forward, that we might pass the mountains before the snowstorms and ice of winter should completely bar our way. We had yet some thirteen hundred miles to travel, and, with everything favorable, could not hope to reach our destination in less than five or six weeks. Fortunately our animals were in good order, lightly laden, with no troublesome vehicles creaking and rumbling after, to delay us with bad roads and breaking accidents.

Leaving Laramie Peak to our right, we struck across the Laramie Plains to the Sweet Water Mountains, and thence descended to the great Oregon trail, crossing the Rocky Mountains at the well-known South Pass. For the rest of the distance, our road was to some extent a traveled one, and our progress, with some little delays, very rapid. As nothing of unusual interest occurred on the route, I shall pass it over without a record.

On the evening of the first day of November, 1843, we came in sight of the lights of Oregon City, which we hailed with three deafening cheers.

CHAPTER XLV.

A JOYFUL REUNION.



O describe my feelings and those of Huntly when we halted within view of the dwellings containing those around the very tendrils of whose hearts our own were entwined, on whose happiness or misery our own were depending, would be impossible, and therefore I shall not attempt it. The day's journey had been very severe—for we had all ridden hard, in order if possible to reach the village before nightfall. In this we had not succeeded; but knowing we were near, we still pressed forward after night had set in, and, by nine o'clock in the evening, had come in sight of the glimmering lights of the little town.

We now held a short consultation, which resulted in Huntly, Teddy and myself resolving to go forward, while Prairie Flower and her companions were to encamp and remain where they were through the night. Our object in this was to see our friends alone, and prepare them to receive our fair benefactress, whom we intended to introduce as an Indian maiden, and then leave matters to take their own course.

Having at length arranged everything to our satisfaction, we rode forward, and, in less than half an hour, drew rein near the humble cottage of Mrs. Huntly.

"And is it here," said Charles, as he gazed with a sigh upon the rude edifice, "that I again meet my dear mother and sister? Alas, Frank, there is a change indeed in our fortune! and now I feel it."

"Repine not," returned I; "but rather thank God that you are safe, and look forward to better days!"

"I will not repine," he said. "But, Frank, there is such an air of poverty here that I could not avoid giving vent to my thoughts."

As we spoke we dismounted, and, giving our horses

in charge of Teddy—with orders to take good care of them, and seek another place of rest for himself—we approached the door with trembling steps, and with conflicting feelings of hope and fear. What if something had happened, and we should find a stranger in place of those we sought?

The house was tightly closed, but not unoccupied, as we could see by the light which here and there shone through a crevice.

“Go forward!” whispered Huntly; and I advanced and rapped timidly on the rough door.

To this there came no answer; and I repeated it, but harder and louder.

“Who is there?” said a soft voice from within.

Gracious heavens! how its tones thrilled me! I knew it! I would have known it among a million! It was the voice of my own beloved Lilian!

“A friend,” answered I, as with one hand I grasped the arm of Charles, who was now trembling with agitation.

“Pardon me!” answered Lilian; “but will you give me your name? as it is already somewhat late, and there is no one within but mother and myself.”

“And do you not know me, Lilian?”

“That voice!” I heard her exclaim; “that voice!” and the next moment there was an agitated rattling at the door, which instantly swung open, and revealed the idol of my thoughts standing before me, pale and trembling.

“Lilian!” I exclaimed; “thank God we meet again!” and in an instant she was folded in my embrace and weeping with joy.

“Oh!” she ejaculated, looking up affectionately into my face: “oh, Francis, this is more than I have prayed for—more than I expected! I did not look for you this season. But, ha!” she exclaimed, as the shadow of her brother, who had stolen in behind her unperceived, fell upon her vision; “we are not alone.”

She turned suddenly round, and her eyes met the tearful ones of Charles, as, with outstretched arms, he

stood ready to receive her, too much affected to utter a syllable.

For a brief moment she remained speechless and motionless, as if fearing to believe her senses ; and then gasping, " My brother !" she staggered forward and sunk half fainting upon his breast.

At this moment Mrs. Huntly, who had been on the point of retiring, but had been deterred by the sound of voices, entered the room from an adjoining apartment.

" Whom have we here ? " she said, as she advanced toward us, looking from one to the other inquiringly, but unable from the position of the light to see our features. " Francis ! " she exclaimed, joyfully, as I took a step forward ; " Francis, my son, do I indeed behold you again ! " and, ere the words were concluded, I found myself closed in a motherly embrace. " This is indeed a happy surprise ! " she added warmly.

" But there, " returned I, pointing to Charles, who, still straining Lilian to his breast, was now gazing upon his mother with that singular expression of intense rapture, which the imprisoned soul, struggling as it were for release, and choking all utterance, stamps upon every feature : " there, " said I, " a more happy surprise awaits you ; " and springing forward, I took the half unconscious form of Lilian from the arms of my friend.

For a moment mother and son stood face to face, gazing upon each other, completely overpowered by their feelings.

" Mother ! " at length burst from the lips of Charles.

" My son ! "

And staggering forward, they fell upon each other's neck, and gave their overcharged souls vent in tears.

For some time no one spoke ; and then raising her tearful eyes to Heaven, and in a voice of deep solemnity, Mrs. Huntly ejaculated :

" Almighty God ! I thank Thee for this moment of unclouded happiness !—for restoring the wanderer safe to the only parent he has on earth ! "

" Ay, the only parent ! " added Charles, with a fresh burst of emotion ; " the only one, dear mother ! My father—alas ! my father ! "

He paused, overcome by his feelings.

But I will not prolong the affecting scene. Suffice, that for more than an hour very little was said, except in the way of thanks to the Supreme Ruler for bringing us all safely together once more. And well might we be thankful to that watchful Providence, which had slumbered not in our hours of grief and danger, but had brought us all out, as it were, from the very "Valley of the Shadow of Death."

The first transports of joy over, we gradually grew calm; and having formed a small circle before the cheerful fire:

"Now," said Mrs. Huntly, "let me hear something of my friends in Boston."

"Alas;" sighed I, my mind reverting at once to my own parents, "I can give you no news from that quarter."

"And have you not been home?" she asked in surprise.

I shook my head.

"Then you met Charles on the way, and he perhaps can tell me?" and she turned to him inquiringly.

"Nay, mother," he answered sadly, "I have not seen the land of my nativity since I there parted from you."

"Why, what means this?" she asked, turning to me.

"Pardon me," I said, in some embarrassment, "if I once deceived you both!—but I did it for the best."

"Deceived us!" exclaimed both Lilian and her mother in a breath. "Pray explain yourself, Francis!" added the latter.

"You remember I told you that when I parted from Charles he was going eastward?"

"Well? well?"

"But I did not add that it was only intended as a parting of a few minutes, and that when I met you on the mountains I believed him lost to us all forever."

"Lost?" cried Mrs. Huntly.

"Lost?" echoed Lilian.

"Lost!" rejoined I. "Ay, lost indeed—for I believed him dead."

"Oh, speak, Francis!" exclaimed Mrs. Huntly, greatly agitated, and looking from me to Charles, and

from Charles to me : " speak, Francis, and tell us what you mean !"

" Charles," I returned in a trembling voice, " was taken prisoner by a band of guerrillas ; but I—I—believed him dead—for no trace of him could be found."

" A prisoner? You, Charles, my son, a prisoner?" cried his mother ; and again throwing herself upon his neck, she burst into tears ; while Lilian, gliding up to his side, took his hand in silence, and gazed mournfully upon him with swimming eyes.

" Is it so, Charles?" asked his mother. " Is it so? Have you indeed been in captivity?"

" I have, dear mother ! I have!" he answered, in a voice choked with emotion.

Drawing back, Mrs. Huntly gazed upon him with a look of unutterable affection ; and then turning to me she said, somewhat coldly :

" Francis, how could you deceive me ! I did not think this of you."

I was about to reply, when Lilian turned quickly round and confronted her mother :

" Mother," she said, " do not speak in that manner ! If Francis did not tell us all, it was because he feared to give us unnecessary pain. Was it not so?" she asked, appealing to me with her soft, blue eyes.

" It was !" I replied, struggling to command my feelings ; " it was, dear Lilian—God bless you for an angel, it was !"

" I crave your pardon !" said Mrs. Huntly, taking my hand. " I did not intend to wound your feelings, Francis, and sincerely believe you did all for the best. But the suddenness of the news, the shock, surprised and alarmed me, and I did not heed what I said. I now know it was all for the best ; for had I known that Charles was lost, I fear the result might have been fatal. Thank God," she continued, turning again to her son, " that you are safe before me now ! Oh, Charles, my son," she added, covering her eyes with her hands to conceal her emotion, " you must never, never, leave me again !"

"Never, mother," he answered, solemnly; "never, while life remains!"

"And this," said Lilian, turning fondly to me, "is why you became so agitated whenever I mentioned my brother! I understand it all now. And this, too, is the cause of your abrupt departure, which has ever appeared so singular to me, and over which Eva and I have speculated many an hour without solving the mystery."

"And did my departure indeed appear so singular, sweet Lilian?" I inquired, in surprise. "Did I not tell you I was going to seek your brother?"

"Ay! but you forget you did not tell me he was lost—and we, you know, supposed him then in Boston. There was nothing so remarkable in your going to meet him, as in the hurried manner in which you departed, without any previous notice, as if you had heard bad tidings. It was this that put us to conjecture."

"True, I did overlook that."

"Well, well, dear Francis, never mind; you are here again; and now we must hear the tale of your adventures, and how you found Charles?"

"Yes," rejoined Mrs. Huntly, "I am all anxiety to hear the story."

"Who shall tell it?" asked I.

"You, Frank," answered Charles. "You can tell it better than I."

The tale I told: beginning with the loss of my friend at Pueblo de los Angeles, and its subsequent effect upon me, up to the time when I met with his mother and sister near the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains. I then narrated my last adventure, and gave a brief description of the scenes already laid before the reader, and how I had, little by little, traced Charles to the very spot of his captivity, only to find that another had released him. This led me to speak more fully than I had previously done of Prairie Flower, whom I again described as a beautiful being, and as good as she was beautiful. I recalled to mind how she had, at the risk of her life, appeared to warn the emigrants on that memorable night while journeying over the Rocky Mountains. I then reverted to Charles, and how I had found him in com-

pany with the tribe. In fact, I gave an outline of all the principal incidents of interest, carefully avoiding any allusion to the attachment existing between my friend and Prairie Flower, as also that we had any conjectures as to who the latter might be, or that she had accompanied us on our last journey.

During the recital, both Mrs. Huntly and Lilian listened eagerly, occasionally interrupting me with some question or exclamation, when the incidents detailed were unusually exciting. In fact, whenever I described a scene of danger to myself, Lilian would press close to my side, and gaze up into my face, pale and breathless, sometimes shuddering at the picture called up in her mind, and seem to hang upon my words as intently as though they were actually imparting life or death to him she loved. Nay, more than this: On several occasions did she become so lost in the thrilling tale, as to utter exclamations of horror; and then, remembering where she was, she would clasp my hand with a hearty pressure, and in a low voice thank God for my deliverance and present safety.

"And where is this beautiful Indian maiden now?" she asked when I had done. "What a singular being! Oh, I should love her so for her goodness, and her kindness to those so dear to me."

"Ay, Lilian, you would indeed love her," I answered; "for she is one of the sweetest beings you ever knew."

"Always excepting Eva," she rejoined playfully.

"Nay, Lilian, I will except no one but your own sweet self."

"But what has become of this Prairie Flower?" inquired Mrs. Huntly. "You did not tell us where you had left her."

"And what if I should say she is near at hand?"

"Near at hand?" repeated Lilian.

"Explain, Francis?" added Mrs. Huntly.

"She crossed the mountains with us."

"Indeed! and where is she now?"

"Within sight of the lights of this great city."

"Is it possible! And why did you not bring her here at once?"

"Why, it was already late; and as she has several companions with her, we thought it better for the party to encamp and remain till morning, while we went forward and prepared you to receive them."

"Oh, I am so anxious to see her!" rejoined Lilian; "and so will Eva be when she hears of her. While she remains with us we will treat her as a sister."

"I believe you," returned I, pointedly, and fixing my eye upon Huntly, who blushed, and turned his head aside, but made no remark.

"Oh, what a surprise awaits Eva on the morrow!" pursued Lilian. "She does not dream you are here; and yet she has been praying for your return, with brother Charles, every day since you left."

"I thank her, from my heart, for her interest in our welfare! She is a noble girl."

"She is indeed!" rejoined Lilian, enthusiastic in praise of her friend; "and I love her as a sister—which I hope she may be ere long," she added, playfully, turning to her brother, who appeared not a little embarrassed. "Oh, Charles," continued Lilian, pursuing her train of thought, "if ever one being loved another without seeing him, dear Eva loves you—for your name is ever on her tongue."

"I am very grateful for it, certainly," replied Charles, evasively, feeling himself pressed for an answer.

"And well you may be, for her equal does not live!" persisted Lilian, with spirit, loth to quit the subject.

"Do not assert that!" returned I, with a smile. "You forget that Eva had a sister!"

"But who knows anything of her sister, Francis?"

"Ay, who knows?" answered I, reflecting on what I had suspected, and on what the morrow might reveal. "But come, Lilian, since Eva has so much place in your thoughts, tell me how it has fared with you both since last we met."

"Oh, as well as could be expected, and *you* away," she answered. "We have walked, and ridden, and played, and sung, and read, and talked, and wondered fifty times a day where you were, and when you would return, and if Charles would come with you, and so on."

To sum up, the summer and most of the autumn have passed—but somehow the time has been more tedious than I could have wished. There is not the society here to please us, and on the whole we have not been very well contented. There has been quite an addition of settlers here during the past season, and the village has much improved since you saw it. In fact, it begins to assume the aspect of a civilized town; but still I feel I could never be happy here.”

“And would you like to return to the East?”

“Oh, dearly!”

“You shall start in the spring, then!” I rejoined.

“Oh, that is joyful news! And Eva shall go also?”

“All that desire to accompany us, Lilian.”

“Eva will be so rejoiced at this! But mother has invested what little means she had in the purchase of land.”

“Well, that can be sold again: and it will have lost nothing in value, since the town has begun to flourish.”

“And will you go, mother?” asked Lilian.

“As my children desire,” answered Mrs. Huntly. “I shall leave all to you, my children. But, come! Charles is about to tell us of his captivity; and, although it is late, I am anxious to hear his tale.”

Thus ended my conversation for the time with Lilian; and forming a half circle around her brother, we all attentively listened to his thrilling narrative.

By the time he had concluded, the night was far advanced; and though I had a thousand things to say to Lilian, I deferred them all to another opportunity, and retired to rest with a lighter heart than I had known for many a long year.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THEY MEET AT LAST.



WHEN I awoke on the following morning, the bright sun was already streaming through the half closed shutter of my room. Huntly was up and dressed and standing by my bed.

"Come, Frank, the sun is up before you, and breakfast is waiting!" he said.

At first I felt a little bewildered, as a person sometimes will in a strange place. But it was only momentary; and remembering where I was, I sprung to the floor, dressed hastily, and accompanied my friend to the larger apartment, where I found the table smoking with hot viands, and Lilian and her mother ready to welcome me with sweet smiles and cordial salutations.

"And how did you rest?" inquired Mrs. Huntly.

"Well!" I answered. "I slept soundly, I assure you, or I should have made my appearance ere this."

"I am glad to hear it, my son, for you needed rest. Lilian and I were not so fortunate; for the unusual events of last night drove all slumber from us, and we could do nothing but talk of you and Charles."

"I fear our presence, then," said I, smiling, "has robbed you of a sweet night's rest?"

"Do not be alarmed," returned Lilian, archly. "Your presence has been more beneficial than sleep, I assure you—and never did I behold daylight with more joy."

"That you might escape from your reflections—eh! Lilian?"

"That I might see you again," she rejoined, with one of her sweetest smiles.

"A kiss for that!" cried I, gaily.

And I took it.

The morning meal passed off cheerfully with all save Charles, who appeared somewhat gloomy, at times abstracted, and rarely spoke.

"What is the matter, Charley?" inquired I. "One would look to see you cheerful, if not gay; and yet you are silent and thoughtful."

"I feel a little depressed in spirits," he answered. "But never mind me. I shall be myself in time. At present I am soberly inclined."

"Fatigue, perhaps?" suggested his mother.

"My father!" he answered, solemnly.

Instantly a dead silence prevailed, and the tears sprung to the eyes of both Mrs. Huntly and Lilian.

"But, come," added Charles, after a pause, "do not let me make you sad, my friends! You mourned my father bitterly, long ere I heard of his death. You must remember my cause for grief is recent."

"Alas!" sighed Mrs. Huntly; "we all mourn him still, and ever must."

Another gloomy silence succeeded.

"I saw Teddy this morning," at length pursued Charles, anxious to divert our thoughts from the painful channel into which his remarks had drawn them, "and I dispatched him to Prairie Flower, requesting the presence of herself and friends. She and they will soon be here."

"And I," added Lilian, "have seen Eva. It would have done you good to have witnessed her surprise and delight, on hearing the joyful tidings I imparted. I expect her here every moment. Ha! she is here now!" she added, rising; "I know her step;" and hastening to the door, she conducted the object of her remarks and Madame Mortimer into the apartment.

I hurriedly arose and advanced to meet them.

"Oh, I am so rejoiced to see you, Francis!" cried Eva, springing forward and extending both hands, which I shook warmly. "This is a joyful surprise indeed!"

"And I," said Madame Mortimer, coming up, "I, too, believe me, am most happy to welcome you back, as it were, to the land of the living! We have felt your loss severely—most severely, sir!" and the pressure of her hands, as she said this, convinced me that her words were not idly spoken.

"I feel myself most fortunate and happy in having such *friends*," I replied, emphasizing the last word; "and, I assure you, I am as rejoiced to meet them as they can be to see me. But, come! let me present you to my long lost friend!" and turning to Huntly, who had risen from his seat, I introduced both mother and daughter together.

Huntly bowed low to each, and, with unusual embarrassment for him, said it gave him extreme pleasure to meet with those whom he had seen years before, in a moment of peril, and of whom he had since heard so much from me.

I particularly noted the countenance of Eva, who now beheld Charles Huntly for the first time. As I presented her, she turned pale, then crimsoned to the eyes, then took a faltering step forward, as if to meet him, but finally paused and let her eyes sink to the floor, seemingly greatly embarrassed.

Not so with Madame Mortimer. With a quick step she instantly advanced toward Charles, who met her half way, seized his proffered hand, and frankly said, in a voice tremulous with emotion:

"God bless you, Charles Huntly! I am most happy to behold you. You, sir, and your friend, both strangers then, saved the life of my daughter, at the risk of your own. You have both had a fond mother's prayers for your safety and happiness ever since; but until now I have never had an opportunity of expressing to you individually my most lasting obligations;" and she turned away her face to conceal the springing tears.

"You owe me no obligations," returned my friend frankly. "If ever there were any due, they have long since been canceled in your kindness to those I love. I did but my duty; and if the adventure was perilous at the time, it certainly brought its own reward afterward in a satisfied conscience."

Here he rested his eyes upon Eva, with an expression as of uncertainty whether to advance to her side or remain where he was. At the same time Eva looked up, their eyes met, and, with a simultaneous movement, each approached and took the other by the hand.

"Oh, sir!" began Eva, in a timid voice, and then paused, while her snowy hand trembled with agitation. Then making a struggle to appear calm, she added: "I—I—am very—very grateful;" and the last word died away in an almost inaudible murmur.

What a perplexing predicament for my friend! Before him stood the first being he had ever loved, beyond the love filial and fraternal. She stood before him, face to face, her hand trembling in his, and her voice sounding the sweet words of a grateful heart in his ear. That voice and those words which once would have made him frantic with rapture; which once would have sent the hot blood to his heart, only that it might again leap in burning streams through his swollen veins; which once, in short, would have made him the happiest of mortals. How was it now? Time and circumstances work great changes in the human heart, and my friend was changed—at least changed in that impassioned sentiment he had once felt for the object before him. He was not cold and indifferent—not insensible to her lovely charms and noble virtues. No! he was affected—deeply affected—affected to tears by her look and language. He loved her still—but with a modified love—the love of a brother for a sister—the love which is founded on esteem, for the high and noble qualities possessed by another, without regard to mere personalities. There was no ardency—no passion. No! all this was gone—transferred to another. Prairie Flower alone held the heart of Charles Huntly.

"Miss Mortimer," replied my friend—"or rather let me call you Eva—I am most happy to meet you; and feel it is I, rather than you, who ought to be grateful, for having been permitted to do an act which has already repaid me ten-fold. I hold that every virtuous deed bears with it its own reward. Pray, be seated, and we will talk further!"

"Ay," chimed in Madame Mortimer, "and you shall give us, Charles, some of your own adventures. Lilian has already told me something, and I am anxious to hear more. She says you are indebted to a beautiful Indian

maiden for both life and liberty—certainly a heavy obligation on your part.”

“I feel it to be so,” rejoined Huntly, changing color.

“And who is this Indian girl? and to what tribe does she belong? The daughter of some great chief, I suppose—for in all novels, you know, the heroine must be some great personage, either acknowledged or unknown.”

“But you forget, madam,” returned Huntly, smiling, “that the heroine in this case, as you are pleased to term *Prairie Flower*, is an individual in real life; whereas in novels the heroine alone exists in the imagination of the author, and can be whatever he may see proper to make her. Therefore you should not be surprised should she turn out to be some humble individual.”

“Well,” answered Madame Mortimer, “all romance is much alike, whether imaginary or real; for the novelist, if true to his calling, must draw his scenes from real life; and hence I may be permitted to suppose the heroine in this case a person of some consequence.”

“And so she may be for what we know to the contrary,” said I, joining in.

“And do you not know who she is, then?” asked Madame Mortimer.

“We know nothing positively.”

“Is she not the daughter of a chief?”

“No.”

“Is she beautiful?” asked Eva, giving me a peculiar look.

“Very beautiful,” replied I, glancing at Charles, who colored and seemed a little confused.

Both Eva and her mother caught the expression of Huntly’s countenance, and the latter said:

“Then perhaps Charles has lost his heart to her?”

Eva turned to him quickly, with a searching glance, and immediately added:

“I believe he has—for he changes color at the mere mention of her name;” and her own features, as she spoke, grew a shade paler.

“One has his heart that is nearer at hand,” observed

Lilian, who, with her mother, had been standing a silent spectator of what had passed.

"I pray you drop this jesting!" said Huntly, with an effort to appear careless and unconcerned.

"Nay, but I must know more of this singular personage," pursued Madame Mortimer, "for I feel deeply interested in her. A girl that could and would do what she has done, can be no ordinary being."

"So think I," added Mrs. Huntly.

"And so you will find her," I rejoined.

"I am dying to see her," said Lilian.

"She must have taken great interest in the fate of Charles, to seek him out in captivity," observed Madame Mortimer. "Is it not so, Francis?"

"Her motto of life is to do all the good she can," I answered, rather evasively. "She would take an interest in any one who chanced to be in trouble."

"God bless her, then, for a true heart!" was the response.

"But how came she to think of visiting Oregon?" asked Eva.

"We persuaded her to accompany us hither," I replied. "As she once saved both our lives, and afterward ransomed Charles from slavery, not forgetting that night, which you all remember, when she gave us timely warning of danger, whereby much bloodshed was averted, I thought you would like to see and thank her."

"And you were right," said Lilian. "Oh, Eva, we will love her as a sister, will we not?"

"Certainly," answered Eva, rather abstractedly, and evidently not so well pleased with the idea of her being present as Lilian; "certainly, we will love her as a sister."

Could a faint, a very faint, spark of jealousy have begun to burn in her breast? I observed her closely, and drew my own conclusions.

Meantime Huntly had remained seated, apparently indifferent to everything said. Was he indifferent?

And why did Eva suddenly become so thoughtful and abstracted? Was she thinking of Prairie Flower? and did she fear a rival in an Indian maiden?—for I had never intimated she was other than an Indian.

My design, as previously stated, was to bring all parties together, and leave matters to take their own course ; and I now felt anxious for all the actors to be on the stage, that I might witness the *denouement*.

For some time the conversation went on, gradually changing from Prairie Flower to my friend, who was called upon to narrate some of his adventures.

Anxious to entertain those present, and divert his thoughts from other subjects, he began the recital of a thrilling scene, in which he was an inactive, though not unconcerned spectator, and had already reached the most exciting part, holding his listeners breathless with interest, when Teddy entered the apartment in haste, exclaiming :

"Your honor—" Then pausing, as he saw who were present, and making a low bow, he quickly added : "Me most obadient respects to all o' yees, by token I've saan yees afore."

"Well, well, Teddy—have they come?" inquired I, impatiently.

"Troth, and they has, your honor! and that's jist what I's a-going to say, whin the likes o' so many beautiful ladies put me out a bit."

"And where are they now, Teddy?"

"Jist round the corner, as ye may say."

"Remain here, and I will soon set Prairie Flower before you," said I, addressing the others, who were now all excitement to behold my fair friend.

And I hurried from the cot, followed by Teddy.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE LONG LOST FOUND.



FOUND Prairie Flower seated upon her little pony, in company with her Indian friends, pale and agitated, but looking more beautiful than ever. She wore a plain, neat dress, without ornament, which fitted her person well, and displayed her airy, symmetrical figure to the best advantage. Her dark, glossy hair was braided and arranged, if not *a la mode*, at least in most exquisite taste, and altogether her appearance was such as could not offend the searching gaze of the most fastidious critic. All trace of the Indian was gone; and gazing upon her sweet, modest countenance, one could hardly realize that her life, for the most part, had been spent in the wilderness, among the red children of the forest.

"And how fares my fair friend this morning?" I said, with a smile, as I came up.

"But indifferently well," she answered, dismounting.

"I fear you did not rest well last night."

"I did not rest at all," she replied. "How could I rest, sir, with such momentous thoughts as kept me company? Oh, sir," she added vehemently, placing her hand upon her heart, "here, here were strange feelings, strange emotions, strange yearnings, but all powerful as strange, and they kept my senses from slumber. Every nerve was then strained, and I felt strong. But now—I am weak—very weak;" and as she spoke, she rested her hand on the neck of her little pony for support.

"Come," said I, advancing to her side, "take my arm, and I will conduct you hence. It is intense excitement which so unnerves you; but you must not give way to it. It is necessary, for the present, that you should be calm, and not lose your wonted presence of mind."

"And whither would your conduct me?" she timidly inquired.

“Within this humble cottage.”

“And—and—are—*they* there—of—of whom you spoke?” she fairly gasped.

“Yes; they await your presence, to thank you for all your kindness.”

“And do—do—they *know*?” she asked, emphasizing the last word, clasping my hand, and fixing her dark eyes, with a singular expression, upon mine.

“They know nothing, Prairie Flower, but that you are the author of many noble deeds, for which they are your debtors, and for which they are anxious to return you heart-felt thanks. My friend and I thought it best to bring you together without even hinting our surmises.”

“It was a happy thought in you,” she replied, with some reassurance; “I am glad you did so; I am glad they know nothing; and I will try to be calm and appear indifferent. But, sir, believe me, this is a great trial! I have been used to danger all my life; I have even stood upon the field of carnage, where the fierce battle raged, and the deadly missiles were whirling past me, fairly hissing in my ear, and there have striven to succor the wounded; I have had my life in danger many times, when I believed every moment would be my last; I have, for many years, seen much hardship and peril; but never, sir, a moment like the present; never a time when I felt my soul shrink within me, and refuse to do my bidding as now—never a time when I had less self-command and felt I needed it more. I am about to enter the presence of those whose blood, perchance, runs in my veins; and the doubt, the uncertainty, the hopes and fears, which are based upon this bare possibility, are mighty in their strength. Oh, sir, such wild, strange feelings as rush over me at the thought, are beyond the utterance of mortal tongue—words could not express them. But I will say no more. I keep them waiting. I will nerve myself. I am ready.”

“But perhaps your friends here had better wait till this first interview is over.”

“True,” she added, “they must not witness it;” and

turning, she addressed a few words to them, and then signified that she was ready.

At this moment my eye fell upon several of the villagers, who were sauntering toward us, attracted, some of them perhaps by curiosity, and others by the news of my arrival. As I did not care to see any at present, I said a word to Prairie Flower, and we hastened our steps to the threshold of the cottage.

"Courage !" I whispered, and led her in with a faltering step.

All eyes were instantly fastened upon her, and the united mental comment was, "How beautiful !" Prairie Flower, pale and trembling, could not return their gaze, but sunk her own to the ground.

"My friends," I said, "I herewith present you our fair benefactress, to whom two of us at least, if not all present, are indebted for our lives. This is the Prairie Flower of whom you have so often heard ; and, taking a slight liberty with her name. I may be permitted to term her the Flower of the Wilderness."

As I spoke, each of the ladies rose and advanced to meet her, but Lilian was the first to gain her side. With a quick step she came forward, and, taking the inactive hands of Prairie Flower in her own, said, in a frank, affectionate tone :

"Welcome, sweet maiden, to the home of those who, already love you for your many virtues ! I have—"

At this moment Prairie Flower raised her eyes to those of the speaker, whose countenance suddenly changed to a look of bewildered surprise ; and taking a step backward, she clasped her hands and ejaculated :

"Good heavens ! how remarkable !"

"The charm works," whispered I to my friend, who had silently joined me.

He pressed my hand nervously, but said nothing.

"Yes, welcome to our humble abode, Prairie Flower," said Mrs. Huntly, who, her gaze riveted upon the fair maiden, had not as yet noticed the surprise and agitation of her daughter. "Eh ! what ! how !" she added the next moment, as the dark eyes of Prairie Flower in turn rested upon hers ; and she glanced quickly toward Eva,

Madame Mortimer and Lilian, and then back again upon Prairie Flower, as if uncertain what to think or how to act.

"I thank you—for—for—your kindness!" faltered Prairie Flower, again dropping her eyes to the ground, and evidently scarcely able to support herself from sinking.

At the moment Mrs. Huntly spoke, Eva had extended her hand within a step of Prairie Flower, and her lips were just parted to utter a welcome, when the same look, which had surprised the former, arrested her motions and held her spell-bound, as if suddenly transformed to a statue of marble.

But it was Madame Mortimer who now fixed my whole attention. She had come up a little behind the others, with an expression of patronizing, benevolent curiosity on her fine, matronly features. The first glance at Prairie Flower had changed the idle look of curiosity to one of surprise at her maiden beauty and the absence of that distinguishing mark of the Indian which she had expected to find. The next moment she evidently became struck with her strong resemblance to Eva, which had so surprised each of the others; and a sudden vague, wild thought—a suspicion—a something undefinable—rushed over her half bewildered brain; and her features grew ashy pale, her bosom heaved, and her very lips turned white with internal emotions.

But it was when Prairie Flower spoke that you should have seen her. There was something in that voice that seemed to thrill every nerve, and then take away all power of motion—suspend every animal function. At the first sound, she leaned a little forward, one hand, unconsciously as it were, stretched toward the speaker, and the other instinctively clasping her forehead; while the blood, rushing upward, crimsoned her features, and then, retreating to her heart, left them paler than ever. Her lips parted, her eyes seemed starting from their sockets, her heaving breast ceased its throbbing, and she stood transfixed to the ground, motionless and mute, apparently without life, or only that life of surprised and bewildered inaction which the master of the

passions sometimes transfuses into the otherwise inanimate object of his creation. It was a strange and impressive picture, and one that would have made the fame and fortune of any artist who could have accurately transferred it to canvas.

A momentary silence prevailed, a deathly silence, that seemingly had in it the awful calm preceding the frightful tempest. For a brief space no one moved, no one spoke, and, I may add, no one breathed; for the internal excitement had suspended respiration. There they stood, as I have described them, a wonderful group—sweet Prairie Flower as the central figure and object of interest, the cynosure of all eyes, and, if I may be permitted the expression, the very soul of all thought. Just behind Prairie Flower stood Huntly, my hand clasped in his and suffering from its pressure.

Madame Mortimer was the first to move—the first to break the silence. Suddenly taking a step forward, between Mrs. Huntly and Eva, and clasping her hands before her, her eyes still riveted upon Prairie Flower, she exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper, that had something sepulchral in its sound:

“Merciful God! who are you? Speak! speak! In Heaven’s name, who are you?”

Prairie Flower looked up wildly, clasped her hands, fixed her eyes upon the other, and trembled violently, but made no answer.

“Who are you?” cried Madame Mortimer again. “For God’s sake, speak! and break this terrible spell of painful, bewildering uncertainty! Speak! I charge you, speak!”

But the lips of Prairie Flower gave forth no sound.

“Speak you!” continued Madame Mortimer, wildly, appealing to me: “Speak any! speak all! but speak somebody! and tell me I am not in a dream—a dream from which it would be terrible to wake and know it but a dream!”

“You do not dream,” said I; “and, I have every reason to believe, are standing in the presence of——”

“Whom?” she gasped.

“*Your long lost daughter!*”

"Ah!" she shrieked: "God of mercy! I thought so!" and, staggering forward, she threw out her arms, fell heavily upon the breast of Prairie Flower, and swooned in her embrace.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.



O describe minutely what occurred during the first half hour after this singular meeting between mother and daughter, is wholly beyond my power—for I was too much excited myself to note anything distinctly. For a time all was uproar and confusion—persons running to and fro, calling for this thing and that, and uttering exclamations of alarm, surprise and bewilderment.

Madame Mortimer was borne in an unconscious state to an adjoining apartment, where such restoratives as could be had were speedily applied, for a long time without success; while Prairie Flower, more dead than alive, was conducted to a seat; where Eva, the first alarm for her mother over, flew to embrace her, to twine her arms around her neck, call her "Dear, dear sister!" and weep and laugh alternately as one insane.

Lilian and her mother seemed completely bewildered; and were now with Madame Mortimer, and anon with Prairie Flower, aiding the recovery of the one, wondering over the other, and continually uttering, "How strange! how strange!"

Charles, pale as a corpse, had sunk upon a seat, and, with his face buried in his hands, sat in silence; while I, after running up and down the room several times, found myself, much to my surprise, alone in the center of the apartment and dancing for very joy.

At last everything began to assume a more tranquil and sane appearance. Prairie Flower found vent to her

feelings in a flood of tears upon the breast of Eva, who, as she put in now and then a soothing word, begging the other to be calm, mingled her own tears with her sister's; while Lilian and her mother wept in sympathy of joy; and my own eyes, by the spontaneous action of an overflowing soul, would, in spite of myself, occasionally grow dim. Madame Mortimer, too, gradually regained her senses; and, looking hurriedly about her, anxiously inquired for her long lost daughter. Prairie Flower was at once conducted to her side, whither we all followed to witness the interview.

For something like a minute, Madame Mortimer gazed upon her daughter without speaking, during which her features displayed all the varying expressions of a mother's tender, yearning love for a long lost child. Then taking the hands of Prairie Flower, she glanced along the arms, and trembled like an aspen.

"It is my child!" at length escaped her lips, in that deep tone by which the very soul gives utterance: "It is my child! the long-lost—the sadly-wept—the deeply-mourned! Yes—the lost is found—the dead restored to life!" Then pausing, clasping her hands and looking upward, she added: "God! all merciful, all wise, and all just—for this I thank Thee, from the inner depths of a grateful heart! This moment's happiness, oh God, hath canceled long years of suffering and sorrow; and henceforth the study of my life shall be to glorify Thy holy name."

During this brief, solemn, but heart-felt offering of gratitude to the Great Author of the Universe, Prairie Flower gradually sunk upon her knees beside the bed on which the speaker was lying, and, covering her face with her hands, appeared to be lost in silent devotion. Then she arose, and, gazing upon Madame Mortimer, with a look of ineffable affection, she uttered the single word "Mother!" threw herself upon the breast of the latter, was strained to her heart, and the tears of both mingled together.

It was a touching scene.

"And now, my sweet child," said Madame Mortimer pressing her lips warmly to the other's, "my long lost

Evaline Mortimer—for by that name, which you bore in infancy, you must henceforth be known—tell me something of yourself? and how you came to be found among the Indians?”

Prairie Flower—or Evaline, as I will hereafter term her—started, turned pale, and sighed heavily, but did not reply. At once I comprehended her thoughts and hastened to relieve her; for I saw in her look a secret dread, lest the unrevealed secret in her possession might even now dash the cup of joy from her lips, by proving her the child of another.

“She knows but little of her own history,” I began; and then I went on to recount our first suspicions as to whom she might be, and what had followed, up to her finding the hidden box, which probably contained a statement of the facts, but which she, for reasons explained, had not yet examined.

“Alas,” sighed Evaline, “and that is what troubles me now! I fear there may have been some mistake; and if, oh God! there——”

“Give yourself no uneasiness, my child!” interrupted Madame Mortimer; “for you are my child, I feel and know; and, for my own satisfaction, I would never seek other proof than what I have found, your likeness to Eva, and a mother’s yearnings. But if *you* have any doubt, examine your left arm, and you there will find a scar, in the form of a quarter moon, which was the result of an accident to Evaline Mortimer in her infancy.”

Evaline started, and hurriedly sought for the proof. We all pressed forward to examine the arm. There, sure enough, just below the elbow, the identical scar could be traced—dim, it is true, but still the scar of the quarter moon.

Evaline gazed upon it for a moment, pale and faint with joyful emotions; and then, turning her soft, dark eyes above, with the sublime look of a saint, and clasping her hands, she said, solemnly:

“God, I thank Thee!”

“My sister—my sweet, long lost sister!” said Eva, affectionately, gently twining her arms around the neck.

of the other and gazing upward also ; “ I, too, thank God for this ! ”

Evaline turned, clasped the other in her arms, and the beautiful twin sisters wept in each other’s embrace.

“ What a singular meeting is this ! ” observed Mrs. Huntly to Madame Mortimer, who now, completely recovered, arose from the bed. “ And how remarkable that both you and I should have a long lost child restored to us at the same time ! ”

“ Yes,” answered the other, “ God sometimes works in wonders, and this is wonderful ! But not the least remarkable of all is the fact, that some years since your son saved the life of my daughter, and subsequently my daughter saved the life of your son—though each at the time wholly unknown to the other, with no apparent connection between the two striking events. The good we do returns to us, as the evil of our lives often falls heavily upon our heads. I have experienced both ; ” and she sighed heavily. “ But come, my daughter,” she added, turning to Evaline, “ you have friends with you whom we have long kept waiting. We must now entertain them, or they will think themselves slighted, and with good reason. When everything is properly arranged and settled, we will have those secret documents produced and hear your tale.”

As she spoke, she led the way to the larger apartment.

“ Charley,” I whispered, “ I fear we have forgotten to congratulate Prairie Flower on the happy termination of this interview and change of name ! ”

He pressed my hand and answered :

“ You must be spokesman, then—for at present I am unable to express my feelings.”

“ Be it so—but you must accompany me ; ” and advancing to Prairie Flower, I took her hand and said :

“ I give you joy, Evaline Mortimer ! and so does my friend here, though at present too bashful to say it.”

Both Charles and Evaline blushed and became embarrassed. But quickly recovering herself, the latter returned :

“ I thank you—thank you both—from my heart ! ”

But for you, this might never have been ;” and her eyes instantly filled with grateful tears.

“But for you, dear Evaline,” rejoined I, “*we* might never have been here. The obligation is on our side—we are the debtors.”

“Prairie Flower,” began Huntly, taking her disengaged hand and making an effort to command himself—“Or rather, I should say, Evaline—I—I——Well, you understand ! Imagine all I would say—for just now I can say nothing.”

“Bravo, Charley !” cried I, laughing and giving him a friendly slap on the shoulder. “Bravo, my dear fellow ! Spoken like yourself !”

“Hush !” he returned, with a gesture of displeasure ; “do not jest with me now, Frank !”

Meantime I noticed that Eva and Lilian watched the features of both Evaline and Charles closely, and then whispered to each other, and smiled, and again looked earnestly at the two.

“The secret is out,” thought I.

At this moment Madame Mortimer, observing us together, approached and addressed my friend, with a bland smile :

“Said I not, Charles, that the heroine of this life-romance must necessarily be a personage of consequence ?”

“And I am rejoiced that your words are verified,” was the reply.

“Thank you ! and thank God that I have found them verified in a way I little expected ! But all heroines, you know, must fall in love !” she added, laughing. “How is it in the present case, eh ?”

“It turns out on the most approved plan,” I answered, pointedly, glancing at both Charles and Evaline, who, judging from their looks, wished themselves for the moment anywhere but where they stood.

“I am rejoiced to hear it,” rejoined the good dame.

“And how is it with you, Eva ?” I asked, playfully.

“Why, I suppose I must resign all pretensions,” she replied, in her wonted light tone. “Of course I was anxious to make a conquest—as what young lady is not ?

But I see there is no chance for me," she pursued glancing slyly at my friend; "and so I will just make a virtue of necessity, pretend I don't care anything about it, and, heigh-ho! look somewhere else, with the old proverb, 'Better luck next time.' Ay," she added, springing to the blushing Evaline, and imprinting a kiss on her sweet lips, "I am too happy in finding a sister, to mourn long for a lover—more especially if a certain somebody (again glancing at Charles,) has any design of becoming a relation."

"Well said!" I rejoined. "And now, Charley—"

"Hist!" he exclaimed, interrupting and dragging me away. "Come," he added, "let us take a stroll;" and arm-in-arm we quitted the cottage.

Considerable of a crowd had already collected around our Indian friends, and were listening to a story from Teddy, who, as he privately expressed himself to me, "Was in all the glory of making the spalpeens belave himsilf and us the heroes of a hundred mighty fights, and battles, and scrimmages, and hair-length escapes, and thim things."

Among the number present I recognized several of my old acquaintances, who appeared much delighted to see me, and to whom I introduced my long lost friend.

After the usual commonplace observations were over, I turned to Teddy, and gave him instructions to conduct the Indians into the cottage forthwith, and then see to having their horses well taken care of.

This done, Huntly and I sauntered down through the village, to note the improvements, and talk over the important events of the last few hours.

As Lilian had said I would, I found the village of Oregon City greatly altered for the better, and that it had already begun to assume the appearance of a thriving settlement. During the past season there had been a large influx of population from the East, the effects of which were everywhere visible in new dwellings and workshops. Some three or four merchants had come on with goods, opened stores and were now doing a thriving business, in disposing of their commodities at the most extravagant prices. A grist-mill and saw-mill had also been erected

on the Willamette, and were now in active operation—the former grinding out the staff of life, and the latter supplying such of the settlers as desired habitations superior to log cabins with the necessary materials for more finished building. Here and there were the workshops of the carpenter, blacksmith, saddler, shoemaker and tailor—and, in short, everything necessary apparently to a business place.

Strolling down to the Willamette, we halted upon a bluff overlooking the romantic stream, and, as chance would have it, upon the very spot where I had offered my hand to Lilian.

“Here, Charley,” said I, “is ground which to me is sacred. Can you not guess from what cause?”

He only answered by pressing my arm and heaving a deep sigh.

“Come,” added I, smiling, “a wager I can guess your thoughts!”

“Well?”

“You are thinking of Evaline.”

He changed color and sighed:

“Well?”

“And now you begin to have doubts that all may not terminate as you desire!”

“You are good at guessing,” he rejoined, gazing solemnly down upon the current below.

“Courage, man!” rejoined I. “Never despair on the point of victory!”

“Ah!” he sighed; “if I could be assured of that.”

“Assured, Charley! What more assurance would you have? She loves you; I will vouch for that; and now that the mystery hanging over her early life is cleared up, you have nothing to do but be yourself and ask her hand.”

“Do you think so?” he cried, suddenly confronting me with an eager look. “Do you think so, Frank?”

“Do I think so?” I repeated. “Why, where is your wonted assurance? Do I think so? No! I do not think—I know!”

“But I—I—somehow—I have my misgivings.”

“Pshaw, my friend—love’s misgivings only. If you

had not these, I should put it down as a solemn fact that you did not love. She has her misgivings, too—but they spring from the same source as yours, and amount to exactly the same thing—that is, nothing. Why, how you have changed! You are as timid as a schoolboy at his first public declamation, and tremble more in the presence of one beautiful being, than you did in the clutches of a fierce banditti. Throw aside this foolish bashfulness, and act like a sensible fellow! There is nothing so very alarming in telling a young maiden you love and adore her, when you once set yourself about it. I have tried it, and speak from experience. Once, I remember, you talked the matter of matrimony over as deliberately as if making a bargain and sale—purchasing or transferring property.”

“Ay,” he answered, musingly, “but it was merely talk then—*now* it is quite a different thing. If—if—she should refuse——”

“Nonsense!” interrupted I, laughing; and then I added, imitating him: “If—if—you should refuse, why——”

“Cease!” he exclaimed, almost angrily. “Why will you be ever jesting, Frank?”

“That I may bring you to sober earnest, Charley.”

In like conversation we whiled away an hour or two, and then returned to the cottage—Huntly in a better flow of spirits than I had seen him for many a day.

The news of our arrival—the restoration of a long lost daughter to the arms of her mother—together with exaggerated and marvellous reports of the whole affair—had already made the dwelling of Mrs. Huntly a place of attraction to the villagers, whom we here found collected in goodly numbers of both sexes. In fact the house was thronged throughout the day, and both Huntly and myself were kept busy in recounting our exploits to curious and eager listeners.

Night, however, came at last, and with its approach departed our visitors, much to our relief and gratification.

CHAPTER XLIX.

UNRAVELLING A MYSTERY.



It was about an hour after nightfall, that, everything having become quiet, we formed a pleasant circle before a bright fire, in the dwelling of Mrs. Huntly, to hear the tale of Evaline Mortimer.

Throughout the day, all had been too busy in entertaining guests to attend to private affairs; but now the transient visitors had departed, and none were by to listen save those most deeply interested.

Evaline, in the course of the day, had managed to steal away for an hour, during which she had opened her "treasure-box," as she termed it, wherein she had found a parchment in the hand-writing of Great Medicine, whose contents she had eagerly devoured, and the substance of which, together with what she knew of herself, she was now about to lay before us.

"Come," said Madame Mortimer, after some trifling conversation had passed: "Come, dear Evaline, now for the romance of your life! We are all eager for the story."

"And when I have told it," said Evaline in reply, smiling sweetly, "I shall have told a tale to which no mortal ear has ever before listened, and a portion of which has been unknown to myself till within the last few hours. I have examined the record of Great Medicine, and find much therein I did not know before; but still, with all the knowledge gained therefrom, I should have remained ignorant of the most important period of my history—important to me at least—but for this providential meeting with my dear mother and sister—the former of whom can perhaps put the connecting link between what I know and my birth.

"As the narration on the whole is rather disconnected, I will tell the story in my own way, and thus in

a more direct form bring to bear all the knowledge I have regarding myself and those with whom my fortune has been linked.

“My earliest impressions are of Great Medicine, and the Indians with whom he was associated. Of his early history I could never learn anything authentic. It was current with the tribe, that he had come from afar, had formerly been a great chief, and was now the sole remnant of his race. Some twelve or fifteen years prior to the period I speak of, or say a little more than thirty years ago, he had appeared among the various tribes then located in one of the more eastern territories, and had brought with him three white missionaries of the Moravian school, who had at once set to work to convert the savages to the Christian faith. The influence of the old man—for even then Great Medicine was well advanced in years—tended much to allay the vindictive feelings which the savages were disposed to manifest toward his white friends, and to which they were secretly urged on by British agents—this, as you will bear in mind, being the period of the commencement of hostilities between America and Great Britain. The result of the matter was, that several of the Indians became converts to the true faith, renounced the barbarisms of their ancestors, and threw down their war implements to take them up no more. These converts were of various tribes, and were subsequently by each tribe denounced as impostors and squaws, and persecuted in many cases even to the death—so that the survivors were obliged to abandon their homes and seek safety in flight. These fugitives, by an arrangement of Great Medicine, all gathered together, and in solemn conclave formed themselves into a tribe, of which he was appointed chief, or rather Great Medicine, for the title of chief was by them abolished. A mode of worship was then established, of which several songs, composed by the missionaries, formed a striking feature, and made the ceremonies more impressive than they might otherwise have been.”

“And these songs,” interrupted I, “were the same you once translated to me?”

“The same,” answered the sweet narrator, “with the

exception of what they may have gained or lost by the peculiar dialect finally adopted by the new-formed tribe. The ceremonies of this tribe," she continued, "were not all established at once, and may now differ somewhat from those of the time in question, though the same I believe in the main features.

"As the Indian, by nature and association, is peculiarly fitted to believe in the marvelous, it is not surprising that some portion of this reverence for the supernatural should have clung to those of the new faith; and in consequence of this, Great Medicine was supposed to be invested with powers beyond the mere mortal. Whether he believed this of himself, I am unable to say; but certain it is, he took care the rest should think so; and ever excluding himself from the tribe, except when his presence was absolutely necessary, he succeeded by his peculiarities, eccentricities, strange incantations and the like, in drawing around himself a vail of mystery which none ever presumed to penetrate. On the whole, he was a very strange being; and though all loved, all feared him; and none ever knew for a certainty who he was or whence he came. If one presumed to question him, it was only for once. The silent look he received from that small, dark eye, was enough. It thrilled and overawed him, and he turned away, resolved never to question him again. Even I, whom he ever treated with affectionate care—who was constantly admitted to his presence when all others were excluded—who had the advantage of being with him in his most meditative and communicative moods—even I, was never made wiser than my companions. As I have said once before, he ever remained an enigma without a solution. Like the rest, I loved and I feared him—with this difference, perhaps—that the former with me was the stronger of the two passions. But to return from this slight digression.

"The tribe, organized under the control of Great Medicine, for a time flourished well, and constantly increased by new converts from the neighboring tribes. But this nearly proved its overthrow. The other tribes at last became jealous, and declared if this state of things continued their villages would become depopulated. They

swore revenge, and took it, and most dire revenge it was. They made a descent upon their harmless friends, and with ruthless hands slew their own relatives, and took the missionaries captives, whom they afterward put to the tortures. It was a terrible massacre—a massacre without resistance on the part of the victims, whose peculiar tenets of religion forbade them to fight even in defense of their lives. At one fell swoop nearly all were cut off. None, upon whom the bloodthirsty assailants laid hands, were spared. Women and children—the infant at the breast—the promising youth and tender maiden—the man in the prime of life and the hoary-headed veteran: all were alike victims—all shared one common fate—all found a bloody grave.”

“What a terrible scene!” exclaimed Madame Mortimer, shuddering.

“Terrible! terrible!” echoed Lilian and Eva.

“And how many do you suppose perished?” asked Mrs. Huntly.

“I cannot say,” answered Evaline. “All I know is, that only a few escaped—some half a dozen, I believe—among whom was Great Medicine. They fled, fast and far, to another part of the wilderness, but still firm in that faith by which they had been so sorely tried. When hundreds of miles had been placed between them and their fierce enemies, they paused in their flight, and, selecting a pleasant spot, erected a few huts, and continued their devotions as before. Here they were visited by other tribes, who, knowing nothing of their history, and struck with their peculiarities and mode of worship, treated them with great respect and reverence, and called them the Wahsochee—equivalent to the English word Mysterious—by which name, and the title of their founder, they have ever since been known.

“Here Providence again favored them, and their numbers increased very rapidly. Their fame spread far and wide over the vast wilderness, and bold warriors from distant tribes came to see them, many of whom remained, converts to their faith. In this manner the Wahsochee village again became populous; and the different tribes, though at deadly enmity with one another,

all concurred in respecting and leaving them unmolested. As those who joined them were among the most intelligent of their race, and as these were from a great many nations, the language of each was gradually introduced, until, besides a dialect of their own, the tribe had the advantage of understanding that of almost every other of note.

"Thus for several years all went on prosperously, and their number had augmented from six to a hundred and fifty, when that fatal malady, the small-pox, broke out and swept off four-fifths of the nation. From this awful blow they never fully recovered—at least, never to be what they were before—for many who were on the point of joining them, were deterred by what they declared to be the angry frown of the Great Spirit; and although other tribes were scourged in like manner, still the more superstitious contended that the Wahsochee religion could not be good, or the Great Spirit would not have been angry with them, even though he were with their neighbors.

"This latter affliction occurred some two years prior to my being brought among them, of which mysterious event I shall now proceed to speak as I find it recorded by Great Medicine himself."

"Permit me a word, Evaline, before you proceed further?" said I, interrupting her. "Since you have briefly given the history of the Mysterious Tribe, may I inquire why it was, on our first acquaintance, you so strongly insisted I should not question you concerning yourself or companions?"

"In the first place," she replied, "Great Medicine had expressly declared (and his word was law with us) that nothing of our history must be told to strangers, whose desire to know, as a general thing, would proceed from idle curiosity, to gratify which would avail us nothing. In the second place, of my early history I was ignorant—at least of that which referred to my parentage—and to be questioned, ever caused me the most painful embarrassment; besides, of what I did know, I had promised the old man to reveal nothing. I knew I was not of the Indian race; but to admit this would lead to

a thousand other inquiries, which could not be satisfied, and which I felt a stranger had no right to make. Are you answered?"

"Fully and satisfactorily. Please go on with your story!"

"The location of the tribe, at the period of which I now speak," proceeded Evaline, "was near the Des Moines river, in the southern part of that territory since known as Iowa. While the tribe remained here, it was customary for Great Medicine to make a journey to St. Louis, as often as once a year, to trade his furs, skins, embroidered moccasins and the like, for powder, lead, beads, blankets, and whatever else he fancied the tribe might need. On his return from one of these excursions (so he gives the story), and when some ten miles above St. Louis, having fallen behind his party, he was overtaken by a fierce-looking horseman, who bore in his arms a little girl, some two or three years of age, and who at once accosted him, in a very gruff manner, demanding to know whither he was going. This horseman, he says, was a very villainous-looking white man, who wore a long, flowing beard, had a black, fiery eye, and was short in stature and heavy set.

"On hearing the reply of Great Medicine, the white man drew a pistol and dismounted, ordering him to dismount also. Once, he writes, he would have shot and scalped the bold intruder without a word; but now he had no such thoughts; and he obeyed him in silence, wondering what was to come next.

"'Here is a brat,' said the stranger, pointing to the child now crouching at his feet, 'which I wish out of the way, and am too much of a coward to effect my desires. Take her—it is your calling—and here is gold.'

"'You are mistaken in me,' replied Great Medicine, 'if you suppose I will aid your base ends. I would not kill that innocent little creature to own the world.'

"'You an Indian and say this!' cried the other, making use of a wicked oath. 'What in the name of Heaven ails the child, that all fear to harm her? She must die though; and if you will not undertake the job, why, then

there is no alternative ;' and he placed his pistol to her head.

" 'Stay !' cried the old man, beseechingly ; 'I will not harm her myself ; but if you wish to rid yourself of her, I will consent to place her far from civilization, and adopt her into my tribe.'

" 'But she is a child of consequence,' pursued the other, 'the daughter of one who is a great chief in his own country, and stands between me and fortune. Should she return——'

" 'There is no likelihood of that,' interrupted the other, 'as I shall take her some hundreds of miles into the wilderness.'

" 'But her father, who knows nothing of my design, and to whom I must report her lost or dead, may institute a search. How do I know she may not be found ?'

" 'That I think impossible,' rejoined the old man.

" 'But *this* will make all sure,' continued the dark stranger, again pointing the pistol at her head.

" 'Nay, hold !' cried the other, in alarm. 'If you dare to murder her, I will make her spirit haunt you forever !'

" 'You make her spirit haunt me ! Umph ! what are you but a decrepit old Indian ? By heavens ! I have a mind to murder you both. But I hate murder ; for in fact one never feels safe afterward. Do you believe in a God, old man ?—for you talk as one the world denominates a Christian.'

" 'I do believe in a God,' answered Great Medicine ; 'and if you dare to harm this child, His just retribution shall follow you, even to the remotest bounds of earth, time and eternity.'

" The other paused, reflected, and then added :

" 'I would not have her blood upon my soul, for I have sin enough there already. You think there is no danger of her being discovered ?'

" 'Not the least.'

" 'And you say you believe in a God ?'

" 'I do.'

" 'You hope for salvation, as men term it ?'

" 'I do.'

" 'Then swear, by your hopes of salvation, to keep

her among the Indians as long as you live—to adopt her into your tribe, and never to mortal ear to reveal a word concerning this interview, or how she came into your possession—that you will never attempt to trace out her parentage, nor make any inquiries concerning her,—swear to all this, and she is yours! Refuse, and her death and yours shall be the penalty!

“‘I swear to all!’ answered Great Medicine.

“‘Enough! take her and speed to the wilderness; while I will away and report her dead—murdered by the Indians,’ he added, with a grim smile. Then leaping upon his horse, he muttered, as he turned away: ‘All is safe, I think, for we shall soon be over the water;’ and the next moment both horse and rider were lost in the forest.

“‘This child,’ writes Great Medicine, ‘behold in yourself; Prairie Flower! and this is all I know of your early history.’”

“Strange!” said Madame Mortimer, musingly. “Here is more mystery—I do not understand it. Who could have been this horseman? and what the meaning of his words? As you were stolen away on the night succeeding my desertion by your father, I had ever supposed—or hoped, rather—you had been taken away by him, and with him, wherever he went; and this hope proved my only comfort in affliction. But now I do not know what to think. This horseman could not have been your father, for the description is not at all like him. The latter was tall—dark complexioned, it is true—but with fine features and handsome person. And then he referred to your father, as knowing nothing of this dark transaction, and termed him a great chief in his own country, and said you were standing between him and fortune. What could he have meant by this last? Your father had no fortune to my knowledge, and mine was so fixed he could not get it. Ha! a thought strikes me. He was an exile from his native land—though for what he would never tell me, and would never speak of his early history. It is possible he may have been a personage of consequence, banished for some state intrigue, and again restored. It may be he had news of this when

he came to declare his intention of leaving me. And now I remember, he once intimated that he would some day be independent of me, though I did not know what was meant. This must be it!" she continued, as if soliloquizing; "this must be it! and this stranger, some fiend in human form, plotting to succeed him in wealth and station. Oh! the wickedness of all mankind! But I forget, my friends, you do not know of what I speak, as I have never told you my history."

"Nay, madam," returned I, "we know more than you think."

"Indeed! and how?"

Lilian blushed and I became embarrassed—for I felt I had, in my heedlessness, said a word too much.

"Pardon me," I returned, "and do not blame my informant! I must own I have heard the tale before. But you will not regret it, perhaps, when I say, that to this very knowledge you are partially, if not entirely, indebted for the presence of your long lost daughter."

"I blame no one," she answered, solemnly; "for all, in the hands of God, has worked for my good. I understand it all," she added, glancing at Lilian and Eva. "These tell-tale blushes reveal the truth. Eva told Lilian in confidence, and love wrung from her the secret. I am glad it is so. You are all my friends, and the tale by rights belongs to you. I might never have told it myself, unless on an occasion like this—for I do not care to have the cold, idle world speculating and jesting on the secrets of what has long been an unhappy, if not a wretched, heart. In my younger days I was headstrong and rash, and did many a wrong, as I have since felt to my cost—and might have done more, perhaps, but for my dear daughter Eva's sake. Ay! for her, I may say, I *lived*; for had she been taken from me, the grave ere this had covered a broken heart."

Her last words were said in a trembling voice and with deep emotion.

"God bless you, mother!" exclaimed Eva, in a tone which brought tears to the eyes of all present.

"He has blessed me, my child—blessed me beyond my deserts. Had I been what I should have been,

perchance your father had never left me, my daughters. But enough of this. It is past now—gone beyond recall—and the result is before us. But go on, dear Evaline—go on with your story !”

“Were I to tell the whole,” resumed the latter, “it would take me hours—nay, days—but that I shall not attempt to-night, only so far as relates to my earliest years and earliest impressions. In future I will give you more, little by little, until you receive the whole.

“As I have said previously, my earliest recollections are of Great Medicine and his tribe. I remember his dark, keen eye, and of his gazing upon me for hours, when none were by, and he thought I did not notice him. But I was older in thought than he was aware of ; and I used to wonder at this singularity, when he believed I wondered at nothing. I remember many and many a time of kneeling down to a spring of clear water, gazing at my features, and wondering why I was so different from my companions. I saw, even then, that my features were fairer and of an entirely different cast ; and this, to my young fancy, seemed most strange, as I believed myself of the same race as those around me. Great Medicine I then thought my father—for so he bade me call him, and so I did. As I grew older, this contrast, this difference in person, struck me more and more, and at last I made bold to interrogate the old man concerning it.

“Never shall I forget his look, as I, in childish simplicity, asked the question. He started, as if stung by a serpent, and his small, black eyes fastened upon mine as though to read my very soul. Never had I feared him till then. There was a wild fascination in that gaze, which thrilled and overawed me, and made my own seek the ground. Never shall I forget his words, as he advanced and took my hand. It was not so much what he said, as his impressive manner of saying it.

“‘Child,’ he replied, ‘you seek to know too much, and the knowledge you seek would render you in future years the most unhappy of mortals. Something I feel you must now know—and this it is : You are not of my race ; you are a pale-face ; I am your guardian. Seek

to know no more, for all is dark beyond. Be one of us, and be happy in ignorance. Breathe this I have told you to no mortal ear ! and never, *never* question me again ! You promise, girl ?' he added.

" 'I do.'

" 'Enough ! Go !'

"I left his presence a changed being, though he knew it not ; for his strange language and manner had excited that eternal thirst for knowledge which he had thought and sought to allay. I questioned him no more ; but his singular words I pondered in secret.

" 'There is mystery here,' I would repeat to myself ; but I took care to repeat it to no other human being.

"To detail my strange conjectures from that time forth, would be to lay bare the secret workings of an ever active spirit. I shall not attempt it, but leave it to your imagination.

"About this period a few missionaries set up a temporary station near our locality, for the double purpose of making converts to their faith and imparting knowledge to the unenlightened Indians by teaching them to read and write. At the request of Great Medicine, three of their number came and took up their abode with us for the latter purpose. I was at once placed under their instruction, as were all the younger members of the village. On my first appearance before them, they seemed surprised, and questioned me regarding my name and parentage—at the same time expressing their belief I was not an Indian—or, at the most, only a half-breed. I replied, that as to myself they might conjecture what they pleased, but that I was not then at liberty to answer any questions, and there the subject dropped.

"A year's tuition and close application made me quite a scholar, and I could now read and write the English language quite fluently, as could several of the more intelligent of my companions. At the close of the period mentioned, our teachers, after presenting each of their pupils with a Bible, and distributing among us several other religious books, departed to another section of country.

"Soon after this, Great Medicine proposed that we

should adopt a more roving life, as in this manner he thought greater good might be effected. Accordingly we began moving from one quarter to another, trying to subdue the wild passions of the Indians of the different tribes we met. In this of course we were not in general successful—though our exemplary mode of life ever appeared to make a favorable impression on their savage hearts and win their respect. In course of time we became personally known in every section of the broad West, and were allowed to come and depart as we saw proper. Whenever we heard of a battle about to be fought between two nations, we would generally follow one party or the other, that we might be on the ground to succor the wounded. If we gained tidings of a strong party about to assault a weaker, we would manage, if possible, to warn the latter. Or, in the event of the forces being equal, if we knew of a surprise one tribe had planned for another, it was ever our design to warn the unwary. Whites as well as Indians received from us the same warnings—though how our information was obtained, generally remained a mystery to those not in the secret. And moreover, great caution was required by the informant in these cases, to avoid exposing himself to the aggressors, who, in the heat of passion, would be likely to seek revenge. On many of these errands of mercy—for I think I may so term them—have I been sent, when I knew a single error would cost me my life. But I believed I was doing my duty, put my trust in a Power above, and faltered not in my purpose. I was never detected but once to my knowledge; and in that instance, fortunately for me, I had rendered the tribe aggrieved the same service as that for which they brought me to trial before their council. This being proved, it was finally decided that the obligation on their part canceled the aggression on mine, and I was allowed to go free, with a very significant intimation, however, that if caught in the second offense my sentence would be death.

“But as I do not intend to enter into detail to-night, and as I already feel somewhat fatigued, I will drop my narrative here, and, as I said before, give you from time to time the most striking incidents of my life, as they oc-

cur to my recollection. I have briefly told you all I know of my early history, and by your leave will so end the story."

CHAPTER L.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

"OOR child! my own sweet Evaline!" said Madame Mortimer, affectionately, as the former concluded; "what a singular life has been yours! and how much you must have suffered!"

"For which she shall be made happy the rest of her days," said Eva, springing to and imprinting a kiss on her lips.

"Ah!" chimed in Lilian, following the example of Eva; "did I not say we would love her as a sister?"

"Ay! but I had no idea you spoke so much truth, and in a double sense," rejoined Eva, glancing archly toward Charles. "I trust we may love her as a sister both!"

"Indeed you may!" chimed in I, laughing. "Eh! Charley?"

"Be quiet, I beg of you!" answered my friend, in some confusion; while Evaline hung her head with a blush, and a pleasant smile played over the faces of the rest of the group.

"And now, dear Evaline," said Madame Mortimer, "I suppose we may count on your spending the remainder of your days with us?"

Evaline seemed to muse seriously, but did not reply.

"Surely you do not hesitate, my child?"

"Why, to tell the truth," she answered, "I love the Indians, and know they will be loth to part with me."

"And has a mother no tie stronger than that of mere association?" rejoined the other, reproachfully.

Evaline looked up and her eyes filled with tears.

"Nay, mother," she said, "do not speak thus! Yes!" she exclaimed, suddenly rising, and throwing her arms around the other's neck: "yes, dear mother, I will go with you, even to the ends of the earth!—for I feel I could not part from you again. From my very childhood I have yearned for this happy moment—to hear the sweet voice of one I could call mother. It may be wrong to forsake my calling; but, if it be, I feel I must err; for I am only human after all, and cannot withstand the temptation of being with those I already love beyond all others I have ever seen."

"Bless you, Evaline, for these endearing words!"

"But I must return to them," she added—"I have promised that. I must return and bid them a last farewell."

"But where are you to find them, my child?"

"They will winter on the Black Hills, some sixty or seventy miles from Fort Laramie."

"And will they remain through the spring?" asked I.

"I cannot say. They *may* remain there through the summer, for all are particularly attached to the spot; and if any place can be called their home, it is the one in question."

"Then you can visit them on our way to the East; and should every thing be prosperous, we shall start as early in the spring as practicable."

"Oh, then we are to go East in earnest?" exclaimed Eva, clapping her hands for joy.

"Yes," I replied, "I am anxious to see home, and cannot think of leaving my friends behind me."

"Thank you for this welcome news!" she returned; "for I am already tired of the forest."

"But you do not regret having come here, Eva?" said her mother, inquiringly.

"Why, I have regretted it all along, till I found my sweet sister. Of course I cannot regret being made happy by her presence, which but for this journey had

probably never been. At the same time I am not the less anxious to return now and take her with me."

"And I," said Mrs. Huntly, "now that I am blessed with my children, begin to feel anxious to see my native land again, to there pass the remainder of my days, and take my final rest with those that have gone before me."

"God grant it may be long ere the latter event!" returned Charles, with feeling.

"Amen!" added I.

"It seems," observed Madame Mortimer, after some reflection, "as if Providence especially directed our steps hither; and it is the only way I can account for my anxiety to visit this part of the world, and thus expose myself and Eva to hardships and perils. What need had I to come westward? I had a handsome competence, and no ambition to be a pioneer; and yet something whispered me I must go. Truly, as I said before, God works in wonders!"

In like conversation an hour or two flew by, when the party broke up, and Madame Mortimer and her daughters were conducted by Huntly and myself to their own abode, which was close at hand, and the excitements of the day were soon by each forgotten in the pleasant dreams of the night.

Time rolled away pleasantly; and the third night after this, having retired at the usual hour and fallen into a sweet sleep, I was awakened by Huntly, whom I found pacing up and down the room, apparently in great excitement.

"Good heavens! what is the matter?" exclaimed I, rubbing open my eyes and starting up in bed.

"So, then, you are awake at last!" he replied, his eyes sparkling with what to me seemed unnatural fire. "Why, Frank, I was beginning to think you were taking your last long sleep, and that I might as well call to a wooden man. Come! up, now, and give me joy! It is all settled, my dear fellow—all settled!"

"Is it?" rejoined I, completely at a loss to comprehend what he meant; but somehow, in my sleepy confusion, mixing it up with a duel of which I had been

dreaming the night previous. "And so it is all settled, eh? Well, I am glad to hear it, Charley."

"I knew you would be," he replied; "and I awoke you on purpose to have you share my happiness. Come, give me your hand!"

"But how did you settle it, Charley?"

"Oh, I made bold to take up the matter at last and press it to a conclusion."

"And so you settled it?"

"Ay, and it is to come off at the same time as yours."

"As mine! But, my friend, I have no such affair on hand, to my knowledge."

"What!" exclaimed Huntly looking at me in astonishment. "Why, you have given me to understand all along that you had."

"I? No, you must be mistaken."

"Ha! then you have quarreled?"

"No! exactly the reverse. But you told me a moment since you had settled the whole matter, and now you say it is to come off with mine. Somehow I do not understand it. Either you or I must have made a mistake. When you said it was all settled, I supposed you to mean amicably settled; but I see now you simply referred to manner, time, and place. Well, at all events, I will stand by you to the last, though I sincerely regret the affair could not have ended without a meeting. Pistols or rifles, Charles?"

"Pistols or rifles!" he repeated, gazing at me with a peculiar expression. "Why, Frank, what do you mean by this strange language? or are you still asleep? In the name of all that is curious, pray tell me if you know yourself what you are talking about?"

"Why, fighting, of course."

"Fighting?"

"Ay, you were speaking of a duel, were you not?"

For a brief moment Huntly looked at me seriously, and then broke forth in a roar of laughter that fairly made the cabin tremble. It was some time ere he could command his voice sufficiently to make himself intelligible.

"Go to bed, Frank!" were his first words, as, half bent over, his hands clasping his sides, he stood gazing at me

with a comical look. "Go to bed, Frank, and dream yourself into a sensible fellow—for just now you are as wild as a night-hawk."

"But if you did not allude to a duel, Charley, pray tell me to what you did allude?"

"To matrimony—neither more nor less," he answered, laughing.

"Ha! I see it all now. Why, how stupid I must have been! But I was dreaming of a duel last night, and, being awakened so suddenly, and seeing you so excited, got completely bewildered. And so you have been *tête-à-tête* with Evaline, found your tongue at last, and said the sensible thing, eh?"

"Yes, and am now the happiest fellow living."

"You found it all right, did you, just as I said you would?"

"So far that I found she loved me, and had from the date of our first meeting; but that, believing herself a poor, nameless girl, she had avoided me, and striven in vain to crush her passion in the germ. Though she would have loved me, she said, to the exclusion of all others, even to the day of her death, yet, had matters not turned out as they have, she would most assuredly have refused my hand, though backed by all the eloquent pleadings of which the human tongue is master."

"Indeed would she!" I rejoined; "for such is her proud, noble nature. You remember our conversation years ago respecting her? My remark then was, if I mistake not, that, though she might love, she would reject you; and I gave, as one reason for it, that she was too noble minded to wed above herself. For what strange things have since transpired, you may thank your stars! You and I little dreamed then what the future had in store! Well! well! thank God, all has turned out for the best!"

"Ay, Frank," returned my friend, solemnly, "we may well thank God, and congratulate each other that we are here alive, after the thousand dangers to which we have been exposed!"

"And she accepted your hand?" I said, after a pause.

"She did, though not without much urging; for she

contended that even now she was but a simple, forest maiden, unused to the ways of civilization, and far my inferior in education, and said that I might aspire higher and be successful. But she loved—that was enough for me—and love and my pleadings at last overcame her scruples ; and I left her with a lighter heart than I have known for many a long year.”

“ Well, my friend, I sincerely congratulate you on the happy termination ! And so, to speak plainly, your wedding is to come off with mine ? ”

“ Even so.”

“ Mine was to have come off on the day you returned ; such were the conditions ; but the day passed, as you know how ; and as we are determined on going East in the spring, Lilian and I have thought best to defer it till we arrive at home. Ah ! Charles, how that word thrills me ! Home ! Ah, me ! how long since I have seen it ! and who knows what disappointment and sorrow may be there in store for me ! And how must my doting parents have mourned my long absence ! Perchance they think me dead ! Merciful Heaven ! perchance they may be dead themselves ! Oh, God ! should such be the case —But, no ! I will not, dare not, think so. I will hope for the best, and strive not to borrow trouble. It is enough to bear it when it comes. Come, my friend, to bed ! for the thought of home has driven all others out of my mind, and I can talk no more to-night.”

CHAPTER LI.

FINAL DEPARTURE.



It is when in sweet and constant communion with those we love that we forget the jars and discords of our past life, in the enrapturing harmony of the present. We then lose sight of the world as it is, and only behold it through that magic glass of inner joy which shows all its beauties and conceals its defects. These moments of earthly beatitude are most precious and evanescent. They are as so many golden sunbeams, streaming upon the otherwise gloomy path of the traveler, and showing him a thousand beauties, of whose existence so near him he had previously no conception.

Thus it was with myself and friends. Time rolled away almost unnoted, and ere we had prepared ourselves to bid old hoary-headed Winter adieu, we found to our surprise he had gone, and that light-footed Spring was gayly tripping and smiling in his place.

Although far in the wilderness, Oregon City was not without its attractions. Of the settlers, many were young people, who had been well brought up in the East, and had come hither to try their fortunes. They did not believe in renouncing all their former amusements; and, in consequence, gay parties, festivities, and balls, succeeded one another in rapid succession. To these myself and friends were always invited, and a number of them we attended. They were rude in comparison to some in the older settlements, it is true; but being in general conducted with great propriety, they often proved very agreeable pastimes, and enlivened the otherwise rather dull monotony of the village.

As spring advanced, we began gradually to prepare for our journey. The real estate previously purchased by Mrs. Huntly, was readily sold for cash, and the receipts doubled the purchase money. As we designed

taking nothing with us but what was absolutely necessary, the furniture of both Mrs. Huntly and Madame Mortimer was also disposed of—possession to be given as soon as the premises should be vacated.

As our party of itself was not strong, and as there were many here who designed going East—some to procure goods, some to remain, and others, who had come here in advance, to bring on their families—we decided to join them, and thus journey in comparative security.

Great was the delight of Lilian and Eva as the time drew near for our departure. In fact, toward the last, they could think of nothing, talk of nothing, but the pleasure of quitting their present abode, and of what they would do when they should safely arrive at their destination.

With Evaline it was different. In this journey she only saw a change of life and scene—(which, if truth must be told, she rather regretted than rejoiced at)—and a sad parting from her Indian friends. Where Lilian and Eva saw welcome faces and a thousand fascinations in the haunts of civilization, she beheld nothing but the cold gaze of strangers and the gossiping speculations of the worldly-minded. She was beautiful and fascinating in her personal appearance—refined, polished, and graceful in her manners—but, withal, so excessively modest as to underrate her own powers, and fancy herself an awkward forest maiden, unfitted for the society in which she was destined more or less to mingle. Both Charles and I, as also the others, ever strove to eradicate this unpleasant impression, and we in part succeeded; but still she was diffident, sober minded, and without a particle of that enthusiasm so strongly manifested by her sister and Lilian.

The Indian companions of Evaline had remained in the village through the winter; and by their quiet, unobtrusive manners, their steady, upright mode of life—so different from the drunken, brawling natives of the neighboring tribes, who occasionally visited the village—had won the respect and regard of the citizens, and, in fact, had become decided favorites with all. While the former were sought for, the latter were shunned; and

the widest distinction in all cases was ever drawn between the Wahsochees and their red brethren of other nations. But notwithstanding this partiality, the Wahsochees were evidently not contented in their present situation. To them, civilized customs had less attraction than the more rude and simple ones of their own tribe, and they were now anxious to depart and join their friends. It was arranged that all should proceed in company as far as Fort Laramie, whence Evaline could either accompany the Indians home, or let them go in advance to herald her approach, as circumstances might determine.

In enumerating the different personages who have figured in this narrative, I must not forget Teddy. For the last five or six months he had been in his glory; and between taking care of our horses, spinning long yarns to the villagers, (whom, by the way, he ever succeeded in astonishing), and making love to Molly Stubbs, he had, as the phrase goes, had "his hands full." Of his success in the last, I must let the reader judge by the following colloquy, which took place between us a week or so previous to the time fixed on for our departure.

Approaching me with a rather timid step, hat in hand, and making a low obeisance, he said:

"The top of the morning to your honor."

"The same to you, Teddy."

"Sure, your honor—(a pause and a rapid twirl of the hat)—sure, and is it thrue ye're after taking yoursilf and frinds from these diggins (as the spalpeens call the likes) in a week for that mather?"

"All true, Teddy, nothing unforeseen preventing."

"Troth! and ye'll be missed from this counthry when the likes of that happens."

"I trust so, Teddy."

Another pause, another twirl of the hat, and a scratching of the head. After some hesitation he proceeded:

"Sure, and it's me own mother's son, Teddy O'Lagherty, as 'ud like to be axing yees a question?"

"Well, Teddy, say on!"

"Faith! and it's mesilf as has been long in your honor's sarvice, now."

"Some three or four years, I believe, off and on."

"And it's not a bether mather I'd iver want, no it isn't."

"Well?"

"But ye 's a-going home, now, and maybe doesn't care for the likes of me iny longer?"

"I see : you wish to be discharged?"

Another twirl of the hat and scratch of the head.

"Why, now, your honor—no offince at all—but—but to spaak the thruth, and make a claan breast of it, it's that same I'd ayther be axing for, or doubling the sarvice, jist."

"Doubling the service, Teddy? I do not understand you. You mean I must double your wages, eh?"

"Will, it's not exactly that—but—but—but—ye sac—(Here the hat fell to the ground, and Teddy made an unsuccessful effort to recover it,)—"Murther take the luck! but I'll say it now if I dies for it betimes! Ye sae, your honor, I've axed Molly, and it's all sittled, and there's a-going to be the pair of us, barring that the two counts one Scripiter-wise."

"So, so—I understand now—you are about to be married to Molly?"

"Why, yis, I may say that's the short way of saying the likes, your honor."

"Exactly; and unless I wish to employ you both, you desire to quit my service?"

"Troth! and your honor's a gintleman at guessing."

"Well, Teddy, as I have no use for Molly at this time, I will give you an honorable discharge, and a handsome wedding present for your valuable services besides."

"God bliss ye for a gintleman, ivery inch of yees! and it's meself as'll niver forgit ye in me prayers!" was the warm-hearted response, as, grasping my hand, he shook it heartily, while his eyes filled with joyful tears. "God bliss ye for a noble heart!" he added, as he turned away to communicate his success to her with whom his fortune was about to be linked.

Suffice it here, that I kept my word with Teddy, who

had no reason to regret having entered my service and secured my esteem.

The long wished for day of our departure came at last, and, being one of the brightest and most pleasant of the season, was hailed with delight as an omen of prosperity. Everything having been previously arranged, there was little to do but take leave of those who remained; and this being soon over, we were on the move at an early hour, a goodly company of thirty souls, two-thirds of whom were of the sterner sex.

As much of importance is yet to be told, and as the reader has once or twice followed me over the ground now traversed, I will not trouble him with a detail of our journey from Oregon City to Fort Laramie.

Suffice, that we reached the latter place in safety, though much fatigued, about the middle of July, Anno Domini, 1844, and some four years subsequent to my former visit here, when I first beheld the beautiful Prairie Flower, otherwise Leni Leoti, now Evaline Mortimer, and soon to be—— But let me not anticipate.

CHAPTER LII.

FAREWELL TO THE MYSTERIOUS TRIBE.



O the great delight of Evaline, as well as of those who sympathized with her, it was ascertained, soon after our arrival at the fort, that some of the Mysterious Tribe had been seen quite recently in the vicinity; from which we drew the conclusion that they were still at their winter quarters on the Black Hills. It being Evaline's desire to see them as soon as possible, it was finally arranged that her sister, Lilian, Charles and myself should bear her company, along with her Indian friends, while her

mother and Mrs. Huntly should await our return at the fort.

On learning our determination, some five or six of the party, with whom we had crossed the mountains, volunteered to go with us—a favor which we gladly accepted—as this would strengthen our party, and render us less liable to attack should we chance upon hostile savages. The rest of the company, after remaining over night at the fort, being anxious to proceed, bade us adieu, and resumed their journey on the morning following.

Before starting for the Black Hills, we procured a couple of tents for the ladies, which we packed on mules; and then, mounting each on a good horse, with all the necessary equipments for defense, we set forth on the second day at an early hour.

For a number of miles we made rapid progress; but at length we came to a rapid stream, with steep banks, which delayed us some time in seeking a place to ford. This crossed, we soon came to another where a similar delay awaited us. In short, our progress was so many times checked through the day, that when night at last began to draw her sable curtains, we found, to the best of our judgment, that hardly two-thirds of our journey had been gone over.

Selecting a pleasant spot, we pitched our tents, liberated our animals and encamped. An hour or two was passed in a very agreeable manner; when the ladies, who appeared more fatigued than we of the sterner sex, withdrew to their quarters, leaving the rest of us squatted around a large fire, which we had started, not to warm ourselves by, for it was a sultry July night, but to keep off the wild animals, of whose proximity we were several times reminded by dismal howls.

A little before midnight our animals were driven in and picketed, and a guard set, more from precaution than apprehension of danger. This done, the remainder of the party stretched themselves around the fire, and, with the exception of my friend and I, were soon in the enjoyment of that sweetest of all blessings, a sound and

healthful sleep. For some time I lay musing on the singular events of my life, and then turned to Huntly.

"Well, Charley," said I, "this seems like old times."

"So I have been thinking," he rejoined, "with one exception, Frank."

"The ladies, eh?"

"Exactly. I trust nothing may occur to make us regret their presence!" he added, seriously. "You and I have faced danger too often to fear it for our own sakes—but if anything should happen now——"

"Surely you do not dream of danger here?" I interrupted.

"Why, to tell you the truth, Frank," he replied, "I have my misgivings that we shall see trouble ere we again reach the fort."

"God forbid! What makes you think so?"

"I can give no reason. It is simply a presentiment of evil."

"But from what source do you apprehend danger?"

"From no particular one, Frank."

"Merely a fancy of yours, probably, springing from your intense interest in those more dear to you than life."

"God send it be only fancy!" he rejoined, gloomily.

His words made me sad, and, added to the restlessness I had previously felt, kept me awake a long time. At last I fell into a feverish slumber, and was gradually progressing toward a state of utter forgetfulness, when a snorting and stamping of the animals aroused me, and together with Huntly I sprung to my feet in alarm.

"What is it?" I said to the guard, whom I found standing near me, pale as death, with his rifle pointed in the direction whence came the disturbance.

"I do not know," he answered; "this is the first I have heard. Shall I give the alarm?"

"No! remain quiet a moment where you are, and I will steal in among the animals and ascertain the cause. I do not think it proceeds from savages, or we should have had an onset ere this."

"What then, Frank?" asked Huntly, taking his position by the tents, rifle in hand.

‘Most likely some wild beast, which, urged on by hunger, has ventured a little nearer than usual.’

My conjecture this time proved correct; for on cautiously approaching the frightened animals, I discovered a small wolf in the act of gnawing a tether rope of buffalo hide. I could have shot him from where I stood; but this I did not care to do, as it would only create unnecessary alarm. Retreating a few paces and selecting a good sized club, I informed the guard and Huntly that there was no cause for alarm; and then returning with a stealthy pace, I got close to the hungry beast without making him aware of my presence. His head was from me, and he was eagerly engaged in getting a morsel to eke out a half-famished existence. I believe I could have killed the poor creature with a single blow, and I raised my club for the purpose; but pity gained power over my resolution, and I gave him only a gentle tap, which rather scared than hurt him, and he ran away howling.

This little incident, though nothing in itself, tended to so increase the nervousness of both Huntly and myself, that we did not fall soundly asleep till the first sign of daybreak streamed up golden in the east. An hour later we were all on our feet; and having partaken of a slight repast, and laughed over our fears of the departed night, we mounted our horses and again proceeded on our journey.

No more delays occurred; and ere the sun had gained the meridian, we came in sight of the village; when our Indian companions, unable to restrain themselves longer, uttered shouts of delight and darted away in advance of us.

I turned to Evaline, and beheld her seated quietly on her little pony, her gaze riveted upon the village, but apparently laboring under no excitement. A closer scrutiny convinced me I was mistaken. There was little outward display of her feelings; but I perceived, in her ashen cheeks and absent stare, that thoughts, mighty in their power, were stirring the soul within. For a short time she seemed unconscious of anything around her, and it was not until Eva had addressed her thrice that she received an answer to her question:

"Is this the spot, sister?"

On the second repetition, Evaline started, turned to the fair querist, and sighed :

"This is the spot."

Then covering her face with her hands, she remained silent until addressed again.

"Why are you so sad, Evaline?" inquired Lilian.

"Ay, sister, tell us !" added Eva.

"I am thinking of the past and the future," was the answer, in a low, tremulous tone. "Oh, my friends," she continued, "you cannot know my feelings. I am about to bid farewell to those who have been to me as brothers and sisters. I am about to leave—to see them no more—to go far away to the land of the stranger. True, you will say, I go not alone ; I shall have with me a kind mother and sister, and other dear friends ; but still you know not what it is to suddenly and utterly tear yourself away from old ties and old associations. You know not the fascinations of the wilderness, to one who, like myself, has never known anything else. Even danger has a charm to those who are bred to it ; and it is hard, with all the inducements before me, to break the spell of unlimited freedom with which I have roamed over thousands of miles of uncultivated territory. But I feel it my duty to go with you. I cannot think of parting from my dear mother again in life. As she has suggested, the tie binding me to her I acknowledge to be stronger than that of mere association."

"And have you no other inducement to part from the Mysterious Tribe?" asked Huntly, a little reproachfully.

Evaline looked up, her eye met his, a slight flush colored her pale features, and, frankly taking his hand, she replied, in a sweet, timid voice :

"Yes, dear Charles, there is more than one."

"God bless you, Evaline !" was the hearty response. "We will all strive to make you happy ; and, in the joy of the future, you will ere long forget the past."

"Forget, say you?" she repeated, looking earnestly in his face. "Forget the past? forget my old friends? Nay," she continued, "you know not yet the heart of Prairie Flower if you think she can ever forget."

"No, no, not exactly forget," returned Huntly, endeavoring to recover from his mistake; "not exactly forget; I do not mean that, Evaline; but rather that you will cease to regret this change of life."

"Perhaps so," she sighed.

"See!" I exclaimed; "the Indians have nearly gained the village, and the inhabitants are already flocking down the hill to meet them. Let us quicken our pace;" and galloping forward, we soon drew rein in the center of the crowd.

"Leni Leoti!" "Prairie Flower!" was the universal cry on every hand, as Evaline leaped from her saddle and sprung to the embrace of her Indian friends, who pressed around her as children around a parent—old and young—men, women and children—each eager to be the first to greet her with a hearty welcome.

For some time the rest of us remained wholly unnoticed.

At length, the first joyful excitement over, Evaline pointed to us, and bade the Indians give us welcome, which they did in a hearty manner.

Approaching Eva, Evaline took her by the hand and said:

"In this lady, my friends, you behold the sister of Prairie Flower."

"Another Prairie Flower!" "Another Leni Leoti!" were the almost simultaneous exclamations; and instantly collecting around, they gazed upon her in surprise, and began talking to each other in their own dialect. Then, one after another, they approached and took her hand, and said that they were most happy to see her, and that she was welcome, as the sister of Prairie Flower, to a share in all they possessed.

This reception over, they invited us to the village, where everything in their power was done to make us comfortable and contented. Our animals were taken in charge and liberated, and three or four lodges assigned to us during our stay among them.

On learning that Evaline had only returned to bid them a final farewell, the Wahsochees one and all became very sad, and a gloom pervaded the village, as on

the funeral day of one universally beloved. The women and children wept at the thought, and some of them begged of her in piteous tones not to leave them. Evaline could not witness these sincere manifestations of lasting affection unmoved, and in consequence her eyes were continually filled with tears.

As it had been arranged that we should leave on the following morning, she was kept busy through the day in making preparations therefor. Her costume for different occasions, which had been procured for her by Great Medicine, and which she had preserved with great care, together with sundry other articles and trinkets, some of which she had purchased in Oregon City and brought with her, she now proceeded to distribute, one by one, giving something to each as a remembrance. This occupied her time and attention till night, when a conference of the nation was called, to which none of our party save herself was admitted.

At an early hour in the morning, our horses were caught and saddled, our two mules packed, and everything prepared for our immediate departure.

Evaline was silent and sad, and her features showed traces of having passed a feverish, restless night. Thinking she might feel a diffidence in having us present at her last interview, I approached her and said :

"Evaline, the time has come to take our final leave."

"I know it," she faltered.

"As there are some strangers in our party, perhaps it were better, all things considered, that we should go on before, and await your coming at a proper distance?"

"Thank you !" she replied ; "the very favor I would have asked."

"There is a little hill you see yonder, somewhat out of the direct course to the fort, whither we will ride, merely for the view it affords of the prairie beyond, and there remain till you join us."

She again expressed her thanks, and I returned to the others and informed them of the new arrangement.

We then proceeded to shake hands with each of the tribe, which occupied us some ten minutes, and, mounting our horses, rode slowly away down the mountain,

crossed the little streamlet, and galloped over a short level to the hill in question, on whose summit we came to a halt as preconcerted.

It was a warm day, and the sun, about an hour above the horizon, streamed down his golden, mellow rays, beautifying each object, by giving it that soft and dreamy appearance, which, in the poetic mind, awakens those sweet fancies that fill the soul with holy meditation and make earth seem a paradise. A heavy dew had fallen during the night, and its crystalline drops, still hanging on leaf, blade, and flower, sparkled in the morning sunbeams like so many diamonds. Above us gay plumaged birds flitted from branch to branch, and poured forth their morning carols in a variety of strains, or, flapping their wings, darted up and away through the deep blue ether. Around and about us bees, beetles, and insects of divers kinds were buzzing, or basking in the sunlight, now dipping into the flower to sip its sweets, now alighting on the leaf to take a dainty morsel, now plunging to the ground with no apparent design, and then each and all up and away, filling the air with a drowsy, pleasing hum.

Not the least enchanting of all was the beautiful landscape that here lay spread to our view. Behind us was the little valley we had just crossed over, carpeted with green and variegated with bright flowers, through which wound a silvery streamlet, and beyond which, like some mighty barrier, the Black Hills lifted their heads far heavenward. To the right and left, at some little distance, was a wood, over the top of which loomed hills one above another, but gradually retreating, till the last one, far, far in the distance, either showed the fleecy-like palace of eternal snow, or gently blended with the cerulean blue.

But before us was the scene which fixed our whole attention. Here, for miles upon miles, stretched away a vast prairie, whose tall, rank grass, gently touched by a light breeze, undulated like the swelling of the sea in a calm, over which fluttered and hovered myriads of birds and insects, now dipping down, skimming along the surface and disappearing altogether, and anon soaring

upward, cleaving the balmy air, and displaying their little bodies as mere specks upon the blue background. To relieve the monotony otherwise attendant, here and there, at long intervals, rose little knolls, clustered with trees, resembling islands pushing up from the glassy surface of a tranquil ocean. And away, and away, and away to the dim distance, stretched this same sea-like prairie, till the eye, unable to trace it further, saw nothing but the soft blending of earth and sky.

For some moments we all remained silent, gazing upon the scene with feelings peculiar to each. Lilian was the first to speak :

“Oh, how beautiful !” she exclaimed, rapturously. “How beautiful and how sublime is this great ocean of earth !”

“Ay, sublime indeed !” rejoined Eva. “It is just such a scene as ever fills me with rapture—inspires me with the sacred feeling of poesy. Oh that, like one of those gay birds, I could wing my way above it ! Would it not be delightful, Lilian ?”

“Most delightful !” answered the other.

“But can we not skim its surface on our fleet steeds ? Come ! for a ride ! a ride ! What say you, gentlemen ?” she added, appealing to us.

“So pleasant a request, from so fair a petitioner, must needs be complied with,” returned one of the party, gallantly, bowing gracefully to Eva.

The speaker was a young man, some twenty-five years of age, of fine person and good address, with a handsome and prepossessing countenance, whereon was legibly stamped frankness, generosity and nobleness of soul. There was an eloquence in his soft, dark eye, and a loftiness of purpose on his clear, open brow, which would have ranked him far above the many, had even a finished education, of which he was possessed, been wanting. To be brief in my remarks, he was the only son of one of the merchants who had emigrated from the State of New York to Oregon City during the previous summer, and one of the party who had so far been our companions of the long journey. He was now on his way East to arrange some unsettled affairs and purchase more goods

for his father, with the design of returning to Oregon the following season. During the past winter, Elmer Fitzgerald (so he was named) had once or twice met with Eva Mortimer; but no acquaintance had been formed with each other previous to both parties setting forth on the present journey. Being daily and hourly thrown together, sharing alike the hardships and perils of the wilderness, it was but natural that between two such individuals, of refined manners and cultivated tastes, there should gradually spring up an intimacy, which time and circumstances might ripen to something more.

As Elmer spoke, I noticed that both his own and the countenance of Eva slightly flushed; and quickly turning to me, the latter said:

"And what say you, Francis?"

"I shall echo the words of Mr. Fitzgerald."

"Then we will go!" said Lilian, joyfully. "But, brother," she added, turning to Charles, "you appear gloomy and dejected. Do you object to this arrangement?"

"Why, to speak candidly," he answered seriously, "I do."

"For what reason?" I inquired.

"I can give you no other than what I told you last night—a presentiment of danger."

"Pshaw, Charley," I rejoined, "there is no danger here! The sadness of Evaline has made you gloomy, and a brisk ride over this prairie will set you right again."

"And it will be beneficial to dear sister Evaline also," chimed in Eva, "by diverting her thoughts from her present cause of grief."

"Suit yourselves in the matter," rejoined Huntly. "I shall of course do as the rest. I merely spoke my apprehensions, which, after all, may only be foolish fancies."

"Lo! yonder Evaline comes!" cried Lilian; and looking toward the village, a part of which was visible from where we stood, we beheld her rapidly descending the mountain on her little pony.

Charles instantly wheeled his horse and rode away

to meet her, and presently returned in her company. She was sad and silent, and her eyes were red with weeping, while her features generally showed traces of having recently passed through a very trying scene.

On being informed of our present design, she silently acquiesced; and liberating our mules, that they might not suffer in our absence, we rode slowly down to the prairie, and set off at a gallop, most of us in gay spirits, with the understanding that, in case of becoming separated, we should all meet again at the starting point.

Man plans and God performs. That meeting, for some of the party, was destined never to take place.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE PRAIRIE ON FIRE.



FOR an hour or two we spurred on to the eastward, in company, through the tall grass, which brushed our feet at every step and made our horses labor exceedingly, when we came to one of the small hills or knolls previously mentioned, where we halted to give our panting and foaming steeds a few minutes' rest.

This knoll was clustered with beautiful trees, under whose refreshing shade bubbled up a spring of clear, cold water, with which we first refreshed ourselves and then our horses. From the brow of this, the view of everything was more delightful than from that of the one we had left behind us. Then we were looking on the prairie in only one or two directions—now we stood above and surveyed it on all sides. To the north of us was a small ridge, in shape resembling an ox-bow, the southern bend of which was about five miles distant. This, after running due north for a considerable distance, appeared to take a zig-zag course and unite with

the Black Hills, which, sublime in their grandeur, bounded the view to the west. To the south and east, as far as the eye could reach, stretched away and away the beautiful prairie, with nothing to relieve its monotony but an occasional knoll like the one on which we stood, and which forcibly reminded me of the oases I had seen in the great desert.

"Oh, this is delightful—enchanting!" exclaimed Eva, with a flush of animation. "This is what I love. It expands the soul, and bears one above the groveling thoughts of every day life. Nature," she added, apostrophizing, "I love thee in thy grandeur and thy simplicity! and know, as I gaze upon thee, that I behold the handiwork of that Great Power above, which regulates alike the mighty systems of ten thousand times ten thousand worlds and the most trifling event that takes place upon them. All alike move by a universal and immutable law; and each, as it were, complete in itself, is but a minor part of that great machine which works for one almighty and incomprehensible design. Were I a poet that could pen my thoughts, I would seek such a place as this, and, alone, away from the discords of my fellow beings, write such inspiring words, that ages yet to come should read and wonder over my pages and deem them the outpourings of a holy inspiration."

"Ay, sister," cried Evaline, "thus have I felt a thousand times; and thus it is I find it so hard for me to part from these enrapturing scenes. Now can you blame me for my regrets?"

"No, sweet sister," answered the other, "I do not blame you—far from it. I only feel you are a gem too rare to part with."

"And so think we all," I rejoined; "and one of us at least, if I may be permitted the expression, thinks doubly so;" and I glanced at my friend.

"Ay, Frank," he answered, "treble that if you like. But come, my friends, the day is advancing—had we not better return? They will look anxiously for us at the fort."

"One ride more first!" said Eva, quickly. "I cannot

bear to quit this scene forever without one more glorious ride."

"Whither shall it be, then?" asked Lilian.

"To yonder knoll;" and she pointed away to the eastward.

"That is far," rejoined Huntly, "and I fear we shall not get back till night, and the day will be lost."

"Lost?" echoed Eva, her eyes sparkling with animation. "Call you such a day as this lost? Come, gentlemen," she added, turning to the rest of us, "you do not think so, I'll wager! On! let us on! I dare you to a race! and my glove to him who first puts foot on yonder hill in advance of me."

So saying, she gracefully waved her hand, and, tightening her rein, pressed her fiery steed down the declivity and over the prairie at headlong speed.

"A race! a race! The glove! the glove!" cried some half a dozen voices: and instantly the whole party was in commotion.

Those who chanced to be dismounted, at once sprung to their saddles, and all dashed away after their fair champion, who, sitting erect, with the air of a queen, was now urging her gallant beast to do his utmost.

Next behind Eva rode Elmer Fitzgerald, striving hard to overtake her, followed by Lilian, myself, and the rest of the party, some in couples and others alone, each and all contending to be first at the far off goal. I say all, but I must except Charles and Evaline, who brought up the rear at a tardy pace, and seemed rather deliberately following us, without excitement and interest, than taking any part in the race.

With the rest of us, for the first five minutes, the contest appeared equal—neither gaining ground on the party, nor falling away from the position he had taken at the setting-out. All was life and excitement; and merry shouts and gay jests rung out, as on we pressed our panting steeds through the tall grass, startling thousands of small animals from their quiet retreats, and scaring up flocks of birds, which, as they soared away, twittered their discontent, and looked down upon us with wonder and fear. On, on we rushed, completely

lost in the enlivening chase, and heeding nought but the still distant goal we were striving to gain. On, on! still on! with the fire of youthful ambition urging us to renewed exertions.

At length the difference in the speed of our horses began to be seen. Eva yet kept her position in advance, but was gradually losing ground before the fleeter steed of Elmer Fitzgerald. Lilian and I, side by side, still managed to hold our own, and were gaining on all the others, who were now strung out in a long, single line behind us.

Half an hour passed, and the change in our previous positions became more distinctly marked. Elmer now rode head-to-head with our fair leader, but both had increased the distance between themselves and us materially. I looked back, and beheld the line stretched out for more than half a mile, far beyond which I could dimly discern my friend and Evaline slowly bringing up the rear. Most of the party had by this time despaired of winning the race, had even withdrawn from the contest, and were now following at a leisurely pace. A few yet held on, but only for a few minutes, and then we were left masters of the field.

For another quarter of an hour we pushed on with vigor, when the panting of our foaming steeds warned us to check them. Elmer and Eva were the first to take this precaution; and, on our coming up to them, the latter said:

"I suppose, as we have distanced all the others, there will not be much strife between us. At all events, we must not kill our horses, and they are already pretty well blown. How much was I deceived in the distance! When I proposed this race, I had no idea there were more than five miles between point and point; and yet some eight or ten miles, if I greatly err not in judgment, have been gone over, and yonder hill is still miles ahead."

"Distance on level ground, from an elevated point, is always deceiving," I answered. "But come! I do not see the necessity of going further. Give your companion the glove, for I acknowledge him winner, and let us return."

"Pray take Mr. Leighton's advice, Miss Mortimer!" urged Fitzgerald; "for it is a long distance to where we left our mules, and our horses will suffer enough at the best."

"Ay, ay, modest sir!" exclaimed Eva, with a ringing laugh. "I understand. You wish to be acknowledged victor before you have won. By my faith, sir, I had thought you possessed of more spirit than that. I am willing to return, for that matter; but I cannot yield the glove until the conditions on which it was offered are complied with."

"Then the glove shall be mine, if I have to make the remainder of the journey alone!" cried Elmer. "Do not flatter yourself, Miss Mortimer, that I have exerted myself thus far for nothing. The prize I must have; I insist upon it; and it remains for you to say——"

"Good heavens! what is that?" exclaimed Lilian, interrupting the other, and pointing toward the south.

We all turned our eyes in the direction indicated, and beheld, stretching along the horizon, what appeared to be a dense, black, rolling cloud.

"A heavy thunder storm is approaching," said Fitzgerald in reply, "and we stand a fair chance of being thoroughly drenched."

"I think you are mistaken," rejoined I; "for I have never seen a cloud of such singular appearance. See! how it gradually creeps away to the right and left!"

"And there are bright flashes, too!" exclaimed Eva, breathless with intense excitement.

"What is it? what is it?" cried Lilian, grasping my arm with a trembling hand, and gazing upon the scene with a pale, terrified look. "It is not a cloud—it cannot be a cloud—it is something more awful. See! see! how fast it spreads! And there! there! mark you those flashes?"

Suddenly the whole horrible truth flashed upon me, and for the moment held me dumb with terror.

"You are pale with alarm!" pursued Lilian, turning to me and noting the agonized expression of my countenance.

"Speak, Francis! what is it?" cried Eva.

"Merciful God!" I gasped; "the prairie is on fire! We are lost!—our doom is sealed!"

"Lost?" shrieked Lilian and Eva.

"Oh, God! is there no escape?" added the latter, wildly. "We must—we must escape!"

"Flight—flight alone can save us!" shouted Fitzgerald. "Let us try for yonder hill! It is our only hope!"

As he spoke, he spurred his steed, struck Eva's with his bridle rein, and away bounded both with all the speed in their power.

"Follow!" cried I to Lilian, imitating the example of the other, and, in the wild excitement of the moment, completely losing all my wonted presence of mind. "Follow hard—strain every nerve—and God vouchsafe us victory!"

It was no longer a race of pleasure, but one of fearful agony—our lives the stake, and heavy odds against us. Can I describe it, reader?—describe our feelings in those awful moments of horrible suspense? No! it is beyond the strength of the pen—the power of language—and must be left to your imagination.

Four miles, at the least—four long and seemingly interminable miles—intervene between us and our destination. Can we reach it? We have but little hope. On, on we urge, with whip and spur, our already drooping horses—and on, on comes the mighty destroyer, as if sent to execute the long pent up vengeance of an offended God!

Away to the south, stretching from the east to the west, and rushing toward the north, with the fury of a devastating tornado, comes this terrific Avenger, sweeping all in his course; making all black and desolate which a few minutes since had seemed so lovely; rolling up to the very dome of Heaven his huge volumes of smoke, of gigantic and hideous shapes, with red sheets of flame issuing from its appalling blackness, as if they were the burning tongues and eyes of unchained demons, so shaped by our wild and distorted imaginations.

On! on!—how our horses snort, and foam, and tremble! They have caught our fears, and are doing

their utmost to save us and themselves! On! on! on!—two miles, thank God, are passed!—but, alas! there are two more before us, and our gallant beasts are already beginning to falter with fatigue! On! on!—behold our terrible foe advance! his fiery banners streaming up brighter, redder and still brighter, as he nears us!—his ten thousand scorching and blasting tongues, hissing, roaring and destroying every living thing that comes within their reach!

Oh! how sublime—how awfully sublime—this spectacle! on which we rivet our fascinated eyes; while our hearts leap to our throats, and our lips are compressed with an indescribable fear!

Now listen to those apparently unearthly sounds! The prairie is alive with millions of voices—which fancy would give to the fiery tongues of this rushing Monster, as the cheering song of his death-dealing advance—but which stern reality tells us are the frantic cries of droves and herds of wild animals, of all species, mad with affright, all pressing forward together, pell-mell, to escape one common, but ever conquering, enemy!

Look yonder! There goes a stampede of buffaloes. Yonder! Another of wild horses. How they tear ahead, with foaming mouths, expanded nostrils, dilated eyes, and a tread that makes the very earth tremble beneath them!

Look closer—nearer! Here—here they come!—above us, before us, behind us, beneath us—on all and every side—birds, beasts, reptiles and insects! How the animals dart athwart our course, now with lolling tongues, and fiery eyes half starting from their sockets, entangling the very legs of our horses, and causing them to rear, and plunge, and snort, and shriek with appalling terror!

God of Heaven! what a scene!

On! on! for our only hope! Another mile is passed; oh! that it were another—the last! We near the haven of our safety. Can we, shall we, ever reach it? Behold the Destroyer, where he comes! Up, up to the mid heaven now rolls the smoke of his conquest! and the sun

grows dark behind it, as if mourning for the destruction he is forced to look upon.

Hark ! what sound is that ?—that roaring sound ? It is the voice of the Fire-Fiend, mocking our hopes ! Must we die now, with safety almost within our grasp ? Why do our horses stagger and reel ? Have they not strength for this last effort ? See ! we are almost saved ! Yon hill looms up invitingly before us ! On ! for strength of another five minutes' duration ! Five minutes—only five—an eternity to us.

Ha ! the dense smoke is lowering upon us, and we shall be suffocated ! No ! that breeze drives it back ! All thanks to God for that ! There is still hope !

On ! on !—still on ! How swift is the flame, and how tardy our horses ! They have no spirit ! They only creep and crawl like snails ! My fortune all to hold out another two minutes !

Ha ! God help us now ! Lilian's steed reels—totters—stumbles—falls ! She is down ! I hear her shriek for help ! How strangely that shriek mingles with the roaring and crackling of this great prairie fire ! Now on my feet I seize her hand ! Now my horse staggers under a double weight ! But he is a gallant beast ; he bravely struggles to the last ; and plunging forward, with a dying effort, he falls at the base of the knoll, which Elmer and Eva have gained in advance of us. One desperate effort more, and Lilian, all unconscious of fear and danger, is borne in my arms into a dense thicket, where I sink upon the earth, and, half stifled with smoke, amid the roaring of a mighty conflagration, thank God its flames can neither reach me nor the being I love !

CHAPTER LIV.

PAINFUL SUSPENSE, GLOOM AND DREAD.



NO tongue can portray my feelings, my deep emotions of gratitude to the All-wise Preserver, as, with the still unconscious Lilian reposing in my arms, I remained motionless a minute, enveloped in a pall of smoky darkness, listening to the roar of the awful flames, that surged around and onward, scorching the green leaves and grass within a few feet, but leaving me unharmed. Once, for a moment, when the smoke settled in so thick that day became night, and the air too much heated for respiration, I fancied we might die of suffocation. But it was only for a moment. A draught of wind revived me, and lifted the smoke, which rolled away in mighty masses after its master spirit, the devouring element; while daylight, again streaming in through the interwoven branches of this beautiful retreat, made my heart bound with rapture at our safe deliverance.

Lilian now opened her eyes, and for an instant gazed upon me with a bewildered expression. I strained her to my heart, pressed my lips to hers, and whispered:

"We are saved, dearest!"

"Saved?" she echoed: "Saved? Then it was not a horrible dream, but a frightfully hideous reality, at the thought of which the soul sickens and grows faint!"

"All that language has power to depict of the awful, it was, and a thousand times more!"

"Lilian! Francis!" now called the voice of Eva; and springing through the bushes, accompanied by Elmer, she rushed up to her fair friend, threw her arms around her neck, and each wept tears of joy in the other's embrace.

"But Evaline and Charles—what of them?" cried Eva, looking up, pale with alarm.

"Gracious God!" cried I; "what of them indeed!" for in the frantic bewilderment of the last few minutes,

all thought of everything but escape from death had been driven from my mind. "Perhaps they have perished! Great God! what a thought! To the brow of the hill led us speed at once!"

As I spoke, we all rushed up the acclivity, and soon gained a point whence we could gaze upon the desolated scene.

What a fearful change a few minutes had wrought! Where, a short time since, all was life and beauty—the tall grass softly undulating to the light-winged zephyr—we now beheld only a black, smoking, dismal waste, without a sign of living thing to relieve its gloom. The fire had passed us entirely; but away to the north, and stretching east and west as far as the eye could see, spread a dense cloud of rolling smoke, amid which we could perceive the lurid flashes of the death-dealing victor, as on, on he sped, seeking new victims to feed his insatiable maw. Here and there, in every direction on his smoking trail, were strewn the blackened carcasses of such animals as had been overtaken in their flight. At the foot of the hill whereon we stood, in the exact spot where he had fallen, lay the remains of the gallant beast which had borne me through so many perils, and which, at the very last, had saved my life at the expense of his own. A few rods further on was the one Lilian had ridden, now an ungainly mass of blackened flesh. Altogether, it was an appalling scene of desolation, that made the heart sick to look upon.

All these things I took in at a glance, but without dwelling upon them for a moment. One wild, maddening thought alone occupied my brain. My friend and Evaline—were they lost or saved? What a torturing uncertainty, where nothing could be known! I strained my eyes, and vainly strove to penetrate the sable veil which curtained the view to the north and west. All there was wrapped in the frightful gloom of impenetrable darkness. They might be living, but even now in the agonies of a most terrible death! and I groaned, and shuddered, and felt my brain grow dizzy and my heart sicken at the bare possibility.

For some minutes we all stood and stared as if rooted

to the spot, pale and speechless with the agony of suspense. At length the smoke began to clear away between us and the point from whence we had set out for the race. Alas ! it brought no hope, but rather despair. All, as elsewhere, was black and lifeless, and we felt our doubts removed by the worst of certainties.

"Oh, fatal day !" cried Eva, wringing her hands ; "and most fatal adventure ! Oh, God ! my sister and friend lost ! and all through my rashness ! Strong-headed and giddy, I would not heed his foreboding counsels, but madly rushed away, dragging him to his own death ! May God in his mercy forgive me ! for I can never forgive myself ! Never—no, never—shall I be happy again !"

"Nay, dearest Eva," said Lilian, consolingly, twining her arms around the other's neck ; "nay, my dear sister—for a sister to me you seem—do not reproach yourself thus ! You were to blame in this no more than I, or the rest. You knew not, dreamed not, there was danger—neither did any of us—and the forebodings of Charles were merely vague fancies without even a foundation. Had he warned us of certain danger known to himself then we might have been considered rash in disregarding his counsel. As it is, I feel we have been only the blind instruments in the hands of the Almighty for working out one of His mysterious designs. But do not let us despair ! I still have hope that Charles and Evaline are safe. They were far behind us, and it is possible may have turned back and gained yonder hill in safety."

"God send it be so !" ejaculated I, "though I have my fears. But, Eva," I added, "I insist you do not blame yourself ! If any one is to blame, it is I."

"You, Francis ? But you merely say this to console me."

"Nay, I will prove it. But for my plan, we should all ere this have been far on our way to Fort Laramie. It was I who proposed to Evaline that we should leave her alone with her friends, and designated the spot whither we would ride and await her. It was I that made light of the presentiment of Huntly, and scoffed at his idea of danger. So blame not yourself, Eva ! Heaven knows

the blow falls heavy enough upon us all, without the additional weight of either one thinking it the result of his or her individual misdoing."

"Ay," rejoined Elmer, "so think I. If one is to blame, all are—but, in my opinion, none are at fault; and certainly not you, Miss Mortimer."

But I will not follow in detail our gloomy conversation, nor longer dwell upon our feelings. Suffice, that for something like an hour we stood watching the fire, as on it rushed, away and away to the dim distance, leaving behind it the most dismal scene I had ever beheld.

Another hour passed, and still we stood in the self-same spot, uncertain what course to pursue. We had eagerly scanned every object, and strained our eyes in every direction, in the hope of being rejoiced by the sight of one living thing. But the hope proved fallacious. All was silent, and black, and motionless, on this great field of death and desolation.

But what should be done? was now the all important question! The earth was still smoking with heat; and the sun, in mid-heaven, was pouring down his scorching rays, with scarcely a reviving breath of air; so that we could not venture from our shady retreat with any safety. Besides, but two of our horses had been spared, and these were so exhausted as to be of no service to us for the day at least.

How long the earth would remain heated, we could not tell; but in all probability till the day should become too far advanced for us to gain another safe point ere nightfall; in which event we might again be in imminent danger from the ravenous beasts that might come with the darkness to prey upon the half-burnt carcasses of their fellows. In view of all this, there appeared no alternative but to remain where we were over night, and make the best of the circumstances we could not alter.

This, after the proposal, discussion and final rejection of several plans, was at last reluctantly consented to; when Elmer and myself immediately set about constructing a rude lodge for Lilian and Eva; who, to their praise be it said, bore their misfortunes with a firm,

patient and heroic resignation, that would have won our admiration, even had we in every other respect been wholly indifferent to their many noble charms.

Our present asylum was a beautiful and romantic spot, of some half a dozen acres in extent, watered by a fine spring, shaded with trees, and carpeted with a velvet-like sward of sweet, green grass, interspersed with white, red, purple, yellow and gold-colored flowers. In short, it seemed a Garden of Eden on an arid waste; and had our friends been with us, or even had we been assured of their safety, we could have spent the night here with pleasure.

With our hunting-knives we cut several withes; and then, bending down a few saplings, we bound them together so as to form a regular arbor, which we roofed over with bushes, leaves and turf, sufficient to keep off the dew at least. With our pistols, which we fortunately had with us, we pushed about through the bushes, and were successful in scaring up and shooting some two or three hares, which we dressed and cooked, and found very palatable—the more so, perhaps, that we had eaten nothing since morning—our provisions for the journey having been left with our mules.

During the day we saw nothing of our companions; and as night slowly shut in the scene, we gradually began to lose the faint hope that had thus far been our consolation. True, if saved, the same cause which prevented us, might also them, from venturing forth upon what seemed almost certain destruction. But there was no certainty—no, scarcely a possibility—that they had escaped; and this torturing thought, added to our lonely situation and the surrounding gloom, made us wretched with despair.

Oh! what an awful night was this we passed in the wilderness! One which, were we to live a thousand years, would ever be a yesterday to us, so deeply and painfully was it engraven upon the tablets of our memories! To add gloom, as it were, to accumulated horrors, a dark, angry cloud began to spread along the western horizon, from which shot vivid flashes of lightning, followed by the booming roar of heavy thunder, as if the spirits of the air, bent on making “assurance doubly

sure," were now marshaling their grand reserve-forces to triumph over a vanquished foe.

On, on came the Storm-King, flinging out his black banners in advance, and vailing the light of Heaven's starry host, as if unwilling one single thing should be left undone to make his triumph most dismally, impressively terrible! On, on he came, amid the almost incessant flashes and thunders of his mighty artillery!

Huddled together in our rude arbor, before which blazed a lurid, flickering flame, that gave our pale features an unearthly appearance, and made our grim shadows dance fantastically behind us, like dark spirits in a weird revel, we sat and gazed upon vacancy, silent with emotions too deep for utterance.

Now the storm was at its height. Sheet upon sheet of the hot lightning, flashing in our faces, blinded our eyes; peal upon peal of crashing thunder, shaking the earth beneath, almost deafened us with its roar; while the rain, pouring down in torrents, thoroughly drenched and stiffened our cramped up bodies and limbs.

For two hours thus we remained in breathless awe, motionless and silent, ere the storm abated its fury; and then only, as it were, that we might hear the howlings of surrounding wolves; which, to our distorted fancies, seemed the loud wailings of the damned over the final wreck of Nature.

Serenely the morning broke upon the night, and the sun again rose as bright and golden as if nothing had happened. Never was a day hailed with more joy. With the first streak of light we caught our two overridden horses, and found to our great delight that they were still capable of performing a heavy task. Mounting two on each, we set out over the blackened plain to retrace our steps, and if possible gain some tidings of our friends.

For an hour or more we saw nothing to attract particular attention; when suddenly Eva uttered a fearful shriek, and, pointing to an object before us, cried:

"My God! look on that!"

We did look, with dilated eyes, and felt our blood freeze with horror. It was the blackened and mangled corpse of a human being—probably the remains of one of

our companions of the previous day. A few feet from it lay the half-eaten carcass of a horse, too fatally confirming our suspicions.

Elmer and I dismounted and examined the body of the unfortunate young man; but all trace by which we might identify it was lost; and with a sickening shudder and trembling steps we passed on, with such feelings as none can ever more than faintly imagine.

About a mile from this we came upon the carcass of another horse, beside which lay the stirrups of a saddle, several scraps of burnt leather, and, oh God! another human body!

"Another victim!" groaned Fitzgerald, covering his eyes to shut out the hideous spectacle. "Who next?"

"Great God!" gasped I; "should the next be Charles and Evaline! But come, Fitzgerald! this is a trial unfitted for ladies. See! both Lilian and Eva seem ready to fall from their horses! Let us mount and away, and take them from this awful scene. If we gain no tidings of our friends when we reach the Wahsochees, we will at least get some of them to assist us in the painful task of searching for their remains."

Shaping our course more to the right, we rode away over the plain, fearful to look beneath our feet, lest our eyes might chance upon another revolting spectacle.

In the course of a couple of hours we had passed the first hill, leaving it away to our left, and were fast nearing the second, the point from whence we had first viewed the beautiful prairie, in all the enchantment of its loveliness, only the morning previous, and which we had fixed on for our rendezvous in case of becoming separated—little dreaming, in our merry thoughtlessness, of the mighty calamity hanging over us, and that grim Death was even then invisibly stalking in our midst to select his victims.

Suddenly Lilian exclaimed:

"God be thanked! they live!" and, overcome with joyful emotions, she could only point her finger and faintly add: "See! see!"

"Ay, thank God," cried I, "they are saved!" and I pointed to Charles and Evaline, whom we now descried

rushing down the hill before us, followed by some fifteen or twenty of the Mysterious Tribe.

Five minutes later we stood clasping each other, weeping and speechless with joy.

CHAPTER LV.

HOME AT LAST.



It is unnecessary for me to dwell upon this rapturous meeting, one of the most joyful I had ever experienced. No one can conceive our feelings but such as have been placed in like situations. Each party had looked upon the other as dead, and mourned their loss accordingly, and it was with tears of gratitude, for our deliverance from an awful fate, that we narrated to each other the manner of escape.

That of Charles and Evaline was as follows :

At the time they discovered the fire they were some miles in our rear, and far behind the rest of the party. Made aware of their danger, they sought to avert it by flight ; and as the hill behind them was the nearest elevated point, they had striven to gain it in advance of the flames. In this they had been disappointed. The fire, driven by a strong breeze of its own creating, rushed forward with such frightful velocity, that, when within a mile or so of the desirable point, they found, to their dismay and horror, all hope of escape in that quarter cut off.

"Imagine my feelings," said Huntly, as he told me the tale, "when, all hope of escape over, I threw my arm around the waist of Evaline, and, pointing to the flames, which, driven forward by a strong breeze, had already passed the hill to the westward and were fast sweeping

around to enclose it with a fiery wall—when, I say, viewing all this, with the calmness of utter despair, I said :

“‘ At least, dear Evaline, we will die together.’

“‘ Rather say live together,’ she exclaimed, ‘ if you have any means of striking fire.’

“‘ Only a pistol,’ I replied.

“‘ That will do,’ she answered. ‘ Quick ! let us dismount, tear up the grass around us, and fire it.’

“In an instant,” pursued Huntly, “I comprehended all ; and springing from my horse, with hope renewed, I labored as a man may when his own life and that of another more precious are depending on his exertions. In two minutes a small spot was cleared ; and, placing my pistol within a bunch of torn up grass, I fired. The flash ignited it ; and a bright flame, shooting upward, caught on all sides, and sped away on its work of death, leaving a blackened circle, within which we stepped and remained unharmed. As soon as the fire had passed, we remounted and dashed over the heated earth to the hill before us, where, like yourselves, we passed a terrible night of agonized suspense. Not having seen any signs of you or the rest of the party during the day, we finally came to the melancholy conclusion that all were lost, and at daybreak this morning set off for the Indian village with the heart-rending intelligence. Some twenty of the tribe at once volunteered to go back with us ; and on this sad journey we had already set out, when, to our unspeakable joy, we espied you coming over the plain, and hastened to meet you.”

“Strange,” said I, in reply, “that I should have overlooked a means of escape so simple as firing the prairie ! It would have saved a world of trouble ; but from the first I lost my presence of mind, and thought of nothing but escape by flight. Alas for our companions ! Have you seen any of them, Charles ?”

“Not one,” he answered, with a sigh.

“Then I fear all have perished !”

“What are we to do under the circumstances ?” he inquired.

“Why, I think we had better set out for Fort Laramie

at once ; for our friends there, even now, are doubtless becoming exceedingly uneasy at our long absence."

"And leave the bones of our late companions to bleach on the open prairie, Frank?"

"No! We must get the Indians to hunt up their bodies and give them decent burial."

This plan was finally adopted ; and in the course of a couple of hours we had again parted from the Wah-sochees and were on our return to the fort.

The journey proved a tedious one, for all were sad and silent with gloomy thoughts. Traveling some thirty miles we encamped ; and resuming our route the next morning, we reached the fort in the afternoon of the same day.

As we rode into the area, the inmates all rushed out to greet and welcome us ; and among them came Mrs. Huntly and Madame Mortimer, almost frantic with joy. At first we were at a loss to comprehend the cause of this strong ebullition of feeling ; but we did not long remain in ignorance ; for the next moment, descrying two of our late companions in the crowd, the whole truth flashed upon us.

"Oh, my children! my children!" exclaimed Mrs. Huntly ; and overcome with her feelings, she could only first clasp one and then the other to her heart in silence.

"My daughters! and do I indeed see you alive again?" cried Madame Mortimer, pressing Eva and Evaline to her panting breast. "Oh! could you but know a mother's agony for the last twenty-four hours, during which she has mourned you as dead, you would never leave her again!"

But not to dwell upon this affectionate meeting, it will be only necessary to state, that two of the party, whom we supposed to be dead, had escaped, by flying from the field and taking refuge on the ridge to the north. Here they had paused for a few minutes, to gaze upon the sublime scene of the burning plain ; and then, believing all but themselves had perished, they had made the best of their way back to the fort and so reported. No wonder, then, that there was surprise and joy on beholding in us the dead alive—the lost found.

The second day following our return, we again set out on our homeward journey, in company with a small party of emigrants, who had recently crossed over the mountains from California.

For several days my friends and myself were unusually thoughtful and serious; but as we neared the confines of civilization, and felt we were about to quit the wilderness, with all its hardships and perils, to mingle with scenes more suited to our tastes, our spirits gradually grew buoyant with the seemingly unalloyed happiness of youthful days.

Never shall I forget the singular feelings we experienced—I speak of Huntly and myself—as we rode into the small town of Independence, Missouri, and recalled the many striking events of the long period which had intervened since last we had beheld the place. Then, giddy with the wildness of youth—alone—free from restraint—with no tie stronger than the filial to bind us to any one particular spot—we were just setting forth upon a new world of adventure! Now, sobered by painful experience, and in company with those we loved, we were retracing our steps, perfectly satisfied there was “no place like home,” and no scenes so dear to us as those of our native land. We had seen danger in every form, suffered all that we could suffer and live, had had our souls tried by the sternest tests, been miraculously preserved through all, been blessed beyond our deserts, and now felt contented to leave the field forever to such as might fancy it, and retire to the sweet seclusion of domestic life.

The countenance of Evaline, as day by day we progressed toward the East, gradually brightened with a sweeter happiness than she had ever known—the happiness of being with her mother and sister—of knowing she was not a nameless being, cast astray by some untoward freak of fortune—of feeling she loved and was in turn beloved. She was now entering a world where everything, opening up new and strange, filled her with wonder, excited her curiosity, and kept her in a continual state of pleased excitement. Eva was happy in the company of one who could appreciate her noble qualities,

and lend her those affectionate and tender sympathies which the ardent soul ever craves, and without which it languishes and droops and feels there is a depressing void within. Lilian was happy, and my vanity sometimes whispered me of a reason therefor. In sooth, by the time we reached St. Louis, there was not a sad heart in the party—unless, in a reflective mood, a dark shadow from the past might chance to sweep across it for a moment—only, as it were, to make it seem more bright in the glorious sunshine of the present.

With what emotions of wonder and joy did Evaline view those mighty leviathans, that, by the genius and mechanism of man, are made to ply upon the mighty rivers of the Great West, and bear him on his journey as he passes to and fro to all portions of the habitable globe! And then the delight we all felt, as we glided down the turbid waters of the great Mississippi, and steered up the beautiful Ohio, past villages, and towns, and cities, where the pleasing hum of civilization, in every breast save one, awoke sweet memories of former days, and made our hearts bound with pleasing anticipations of what was yet to come.

On, on we swept up the Ohio, past the flourishing cities of Louisville and Cincinnati (making only a short stay at each), to that of Pittsburgh, where our steamer was exchanged for the stage, to bear us over the romantic Alleghanies, and that in turn for the rushing car, to land us in Baltimore, again in Philadelphia, and lastly in that great emporium of the Western Continent, New York. And so on, on—ever-changing, continually progressing—toward the golden haven of our desires—which, Heaven be praised! we at last reached in safety.

During the latter part of the journey, my feelings became very sad. I was nearing the home of my youth—the abode of my dearly-loved parents—after many long years of painful and eventful separation. What changes might not have occurred in the interval!—changes, peradventure, to rend my heart with anguish! My parents—my affectionate mother—my kind and indulgent father—how I trembled to think of them! What if, as

in the case of my friends, one or both had been called from the scenes of earth, and were now sleeping their last sleep in the moldering church-yard—never to bless me more with the soft light of their benign eyes! Oh! what a heart-sickening feeling, of almost utter desolation, the very thought of it produced! until I forced myself to think no more, lest I should lack physical strength to bear me on to the knowledge I longed yet dreaded to gain.

Pressing invitations from us, and I scarcely need add a more eloquent persuasion from the soft, dark eyes of another, had induced Elmer Fitzgerald to extend his journey a few hundred miles beyond his original intention. Arrived in the city, we all took rooms at a hotel, until such time as we could notify our friends of our presence—or rather, until I could see my parents, if living, in advance of the others.

With a heart palpitating with hope and fear, I hurried into a carriage, and, ordering the driver not to spare his horses, leaned back on my seat, and gave myself up to the most intense and painful meditations—occasionally listening to the rumbling of the swift whirling wheels, and wondering when they would cease their motion at their present destination—or gazing from the window at the thousand objects flitting past me, with that vague look of the occupied mind which takes in each thing distinctly and yet seems to see nothing whatever.

“Crack went the whip, round went the wheels,” and on we sped at the same rapid pace. At length my attention was arrested by objects familiar from my boyhood, and my heart seemed to creep to my throat, for I knew I was close upon the mansion of my father. A few moments of breathless suspense, and the carriage stopped suddenly, the door swung open, and, leaping out, I rushed up the steps, trembling in every limb.

Two minutes later, unannounced, I stood in the presence of my parents, but saw I was not recognized.

“Mother! father!” I cried; “have you forgotten your long absent son?”

There was a brief moment of speechless, joyful amaze-

ment, and the next I was in my mother's arms, while my father stood by, pressing my hand and weeping like a child.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE CLOSING SCENES.



READER! I am about to close—about to present to you the last scene of scenes I shall ever give of this my drama of life. I am about to bid you farewell, perchance forever. May I not trust we part as friends?—as boon companions, who have together made a long pilgrimage, with an ever cordial attachment and friendly understanding? From the land of my nativity you have followed me through a period of years, over the wilderness of the far, Far West, back again to my native land. You have seen me in prosperity and adversity—in sickness and health—in moments of ease and safety—in moments of hardship and peril—in the calmness of quiet meditation, and amid the turmoil, and strife, and din of battle. From first to last I have been ever present to you—made you my confidant—laid bare to your gaze the secret workings of my ardent spirit. May I not trust I have had your sympathy? that you have felt an interest in my fate? and also in the fate of those with whom my fortune has been so closely connected? Yes! I will trust we part as friends—that when you have perused the last page of this, my humble scroll, you will not cast it aside as altogether worthless—that you will long after spare me and my friends a single thought of pleasing remembrance. I can not see you—can not hear your answer—and yet something whispers me it is as I desire—that we shall not separate but with mutual regrets. Be this as it may, the farewell must be said—the solemn farewell:

“That word which must be and hath been—
That sound which makes us linger.”

* * * * *

It was a brilliant scene. In a large saloon, made gorgeous with all the luxuries wealth could procure from all parts of the habitable globe—with soft carpets from Turkey, antique vases from China, old paintings from Germany, and statues from Florence—with long mirrors, that doubled the splendors of the scene—with chairs, and sofas, and ottomans, covered with the softest and most costly of velvets—with everything, in short, to please, dazzle, and fascinate the eye—over which streamed a soft, bewitching, alabaster light—where strains of melodious music stole sweetly upon the enraptured sense of the hearer : in such a gorgeous apartment as this, I say, were collected bright faces, sparkling eyes, snowy arms, and lovely forms—set off with vestures of the richest, costliest and most fashionable make—adorned with jewels of diamond, and ruby, and pearl, and sapphire : in such a place as this—in the mansion of my father—were assembled the élite of Boston, to witness the nuptials of Evaline and Charles, Eva and Elmer, Lilian and myself:

Need I dwell upon the scene? Need I say it was as happy as gorgeous? Need I add, that the fair maidens, led to the altar, looked more sweet and lovely than any had ever before seen them? No ! it is unnecessary for me to enter into detail here, for the quick perception of the reader will divine all I would say. Enough, that the rough scenes of the wilderness, through which we had passed, could not be more strongly contrasted than on this never-to-be-forgotten occasion of unalloyed happiness.

The solemn nuptial rite was followed with congratulations—with music, dancing, and festivities—and it was long past the noon of night ere the well-pleased guests departed, and a small circle of happy friends were left to themselves.

When all had at last become quiet, and none were

present but the newly-married and their nearest and dearest relatives :

“Now,” said Madame Mortimer, with a smile, “to add pleasure to pleasure—to make the happy happier—I have a joyful surprise for you all.”

“Permit me to doubt,” said I, “if aught any one can say, can in any degree add to the happiness of those here present. I look upon the thing as impossible.”

“And yet,” pursued the other, smiling archly, “would it not add pleasure even to you, Francis, were I to tell you that a dark mystery has been cleared up, and a wrong matter set right?”

“What mean you?” asked I, while the rest turned to her with eager curiosity.

“What would you think should I now proceed to prove to you, my friends, that the person you have long known as Madame Mortimer, is from this time forth to be known as the Marchioness of Lombardy?”

“How? what? speak!” exclaimed one and all in a breath.

“Yes, my dear friends, such is the fact. Since my return, I have received letters from England and France, stating that my late husband—for he is now dead—was none other than the Marquis of Lombardy, who was banished from France for some state intrigue, and afterward restored to favor. Fearing, before his death, that some future revolution might again endanger his property, he managed to dispose of sufficient to purchase a large estate in England, which he has generously bequeathed to me and my heirs forever. Accompanying his will, which I have now in my possession, is a long letter, in which he asks forgiveness for the wrong he had formerly done me in separation ; and wherein he states, as a reason for never mentioning his title, that at some future time he had designed taking me by surprise ; but that the news of the restoration of himself and fortune, coming at a moment when his worst passions were excited, he had left me in an abrupt manner, taking Evaline with him—who, he sorrowfully adds, was afterward lost or murdered ; that of this foul deed he had always suspected a near relation of his—a villain who brought

him the intelligence of his fortune being restored—and that in consequence he had taken what precautions he could, to put his property, in case of his sudden decease, entirely beyond the other's reach. This, my friends, is all I will tell you to-night; but to-morrow you shall have proofs of all I have said. And now, my daughters, that you are happily wedded, I give you this estate as a marriage portion."

I will not dwell upon the emotions of joyful surprise which this revelation excited in the hearts of those who heard it. Suffice that it did add pleasure to pleasure—that it did make the happy happier.

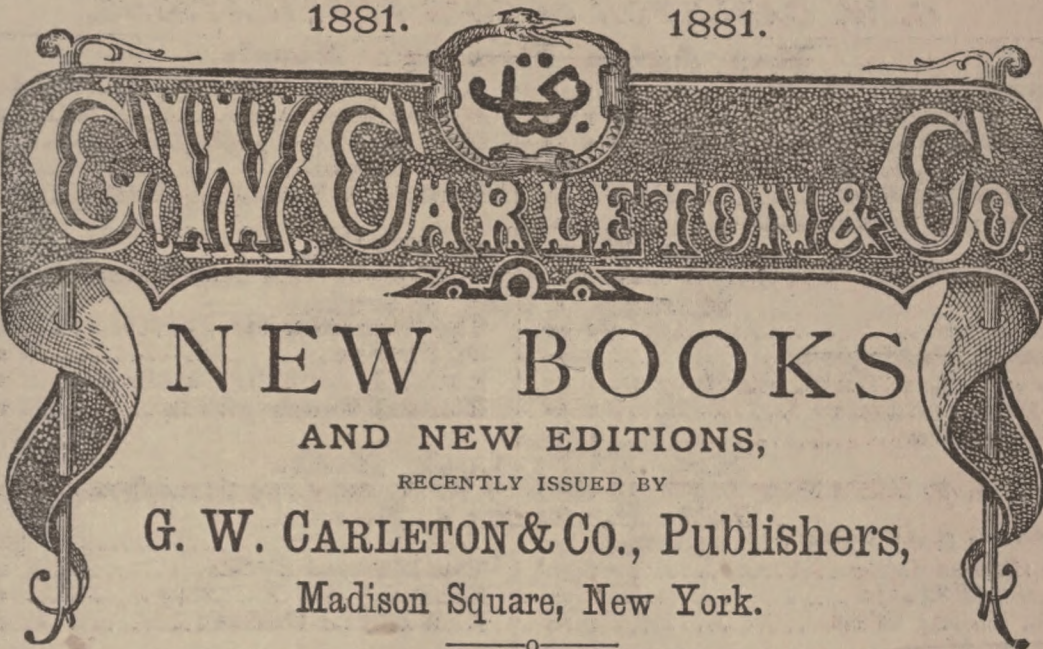
A sentence more and I have done. The words of the Marchioness of Lombardy were subsequently verified in every particular; and Charles Huntly and Elmer Fitzgerald have had no cause, thus far, even in a pecuniary point of view, to regret the choice they made in the wilderness of the Far West. Propitious fortune now smiles upon all, and all are happy.

Thus is it ever. To-day we rise—to-morrow fall—to rise again perchance in the further time to come. Prosperity and adversity are ever so closely linked that the most trivial event may make or mar our happiness. The Past we know—the Present we see—but who shall say aught of the Future?

THE END.

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